50 BEST COMIC MOVIES!

1 MONTH TO WIZARD zero

WIZARD

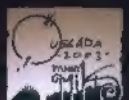
TOO HOT FOR COMICS?

STRACZYNSKI *BRINGS THE BLOOD, GUTS & GIRLS! TO* ***MARVEL!***

From top: Hyperion, Princess and Dr. Spectrum from Marvel's "Supreme Power"

DOOM!

25 MUST-HAVE ISSUES!



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THE COMICS MAGAZINE • 143

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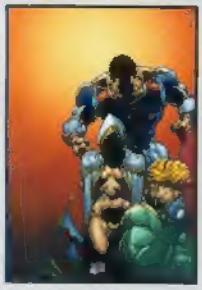

The **Supreme Power** cover (**left**) was drawn by Joe Quesada and Danny Miki. For a seven-page preview of the new Marvel/MAX series, flip over to **page 44**! The **Comic Book Movie Collage** cover (**right**) previews our countdown of the 50 Greatest Comic Movies Ever Made feature on **page 82**!

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Marvel E-I-C Joe Quesada!

COOL STUFF THROUGH THE MAIL

EXCLUSIVE OFFER

KINGDOM COME'S RED ARROW!

Wizard Entertainment joins forces with DC Direct to produce an exclusive new action figure based on the Red Arrow character from Mark Waid and Alex Ross' seminal superhero epic, *Kingdom Come*! To find out how to score the bullseye for this one-of-a-kind collectible, shoot over to page **page 32**!

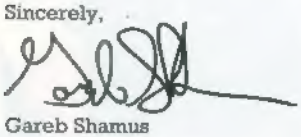
FROM THE TOP

WIZARD'S FILM FESTIVAL

It nearly killed us, but we made it through alive: the first-ever Wizard Film Festival.

To make the research for our "Top Comic Book Movies" feature (**see p. 82**) a more enjoyable and office-bonding experience, we made a competition out of watching the movies. Our three gutsy staff writers and six intrepid editors sat down every night after work (and sometimes during office hours!) for a weeklong film fest of every comic book movie ever made—from the top of the heap (like "Spider-Man" and "Superman") to the bottom of the barrel (someone help us forget "Return of the Swamp Thing"). Who could go the longest without going insane? (That Jesse Thompson kid is a machine!) Who could consume the most popcorn? (I'm looking at you, Brian Cunningham!) Who could recite every line from "Tank Girl"? (Richard Ho, your severance check is in the mail!) All in all, it was a rollicking good time, and resulted in one of our biggest features to date—ranking the Top Comic Movies of All Time! Which one's No. 1? I'm not telling, but we're sure to get a lot of mail after *this* story sees print. Enjoy!

Sincerely,



Gareb Shamus

P.S.—Don't forget, next month we unveil the blockbuster Wizard #0, *quite possibly the biggest event to happen to us since our first issue! Check out* **page 23** *for details on what to expect. You will not want to miss* Wizard #0*!*

BY THE NUMBERS

Statistics compiled when we put this bad boy together

The number of consecutive hours Associate Editor Jesse Thompson watched comic flicks to win the Wizard movie challenge	32
Number of hours the staff goofed on Thompson for knowing all the dialogue to "Batman and Robin"	84
Times we had to explain to Editor Brian Cunningham that "Supergirls Gone Wild" *wasn't* a comic book movie	23
Fake breasts Staff Writer Richard Ho counted on spokesmodels at the E3 video game show	71*
Fake breasts Ho touched in an attempt to verify his research	16
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Gallons of sweat excreted by partygoers because of outstanding police warrants	19
European writers we did 2-page Q&As with this month	2
European writers we did 2-page Q&As with that we think are certifiably nuts	1**
Times aloud we read the broken English e-mails of our new favorite artist, Gabriele Dell'Otto	13
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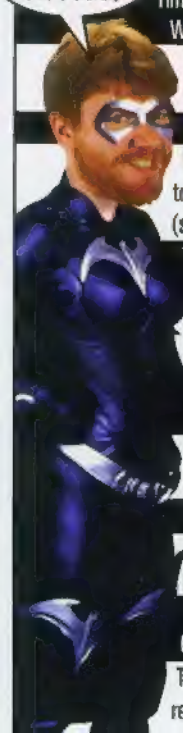

MASTHEAD

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SUPREME POWER *by Joe Quesada, Danny Miki and Studio F*
COMIC MOVIES COLLAGE *All photos courtesy their respective studios*

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MAGIC WORDS

JIM'S FINAL 'MAGIC WORDS'... KEVIN SMITH VS. PRISON MAIL... & 10 BUCKS FROM THE CLINK!

This is it, cats and kids. My last "Magic Words" column. I've been shepherding this merry *Wizard* standard for all of 107 issues now, at which point it's finally time to put me out to pasture—the Cow pasture, that is, as I'm now editor-in-chief at Top Cow Productions. No, really. Next issue brings *Wizard* #0, and the dawn of a brand new age and stuff.

In nine years, I figure I've read about 300,000 of your letters. I've also learned a few things. To wit:

1) Never open an envelope that feels "sticky."

2) Be VERY careful when viewing Polaroid photos that readers send in.

3) *Damn*, but paper cuts can really hurt!

4) And for some reason, "Who would win in a fight between Character X and Character Y?" seems to be a very compelling question in the collective geek zeitgeist.

Along the way over 107 issues, I've tried to be an answerer of questions, a solver of riddles, a salver of wounds, a true Vanguard of the People! Friend to the comic aficionado, no matter how geeky or downtrodden! I often question if I've succeeded to any degree. I think I have, and the answer, as always, came in the mail.

As I was opening letters that went into this, my final "Magic Words," I got a letter with a check enclosed. The check was drawn on the account of the "Minnesota Correctional Facility, Agency Trust Fund." It's in the amount of $10. It's made out to me. Prisoner Steven Wood, #180969 says:

"I'd like to extend my congratulations on your new job at Top Cow. Your astounding wit and wisdom will be missed in these pages. I throw in a week's wages—$10—as a farewell gift to you. Have a sixer and some Krispy Kremes on me, bub, and thanks for the memories."

Wow. Hard-earned money from a guy stamping out license plates. Only in America. And maybe Australia.

Once again, into the breach...

Dear Wizard Guys Who Are Left,

Losing McLauchlin on the letters column is a crushing blow to *Wizard*, as nobody else on staff can even read. Now I'm going to be stuck reciting letter after letter to I don't even know who—Mike Cotton?—and transcribing his broken-English responses. I imagine this is going to be even more embarrassing than when McLauchlin used to have me read him the letters from incarcerated felons, because he said he needed both his hands free to "formulate his responses."

Fare thee well, Jimbo. You'll be missed...but your solo flights of fancy won't be, if you "grip" what I'm saying.

Kevin Smith
Designated Prisoner Letter Reader
to Jim McLauchlin
1998–2003

And here you thought *Daredevil: The Target* was so damn late 'cause Kev was busy working on movies. And there's always that Spider-Man mini-series he was doing, too...

BUNNY AWARD

Dear Mr. McLauchlin,

I had stopped reading comics for a time, for a period of about four years. No real reason. Just because.

Then at the turn of our new century, Marvel launched its "Ultimate" books, which caught my attention. I read *Ultimate X-Men* and the artwork and storyline was sensational. But having been away from comics for a while, I realized something...

The level of violence and profanity in comics had dramatically increased. I was surprised that certain words were commonly used, not censored at all. I learned how much things could change in a mere four years.

I'm not trying to "pick on" today's comic books. I love comics and I'll always be a fan. But if comics have changed this much in just four years, what will they be like in the next decade?

Hue Vang
Manitowoc, WI

Look, man—*everything* has changed in the last four years. Go back a few years ago and it was the HUGEST of huge deals to see two women kiss on TV's "Roseanne." Now it's a fairly commonplace occurrence. In terms of content, the dial has been turned up to 11 in novels such as *Hannibal*, TV shows such as "South Park" and even magazines such as *FHM* or *Maxim*. Yesterday's edgy is today's passé, and four years from now, that cycle will turn itself all over again. Comics need not exist in a vacuum, nor ignore what's happening in other media.

Or, as recent *Ultimate X-Men* writer Mark Millar put it, "What will comics be like in the next decade? If I have anything to say in it, and I believe I shall, they'll be f---ing great!"

Bob Dahlstrom
bob904@lycos.com

1) If ever—EVER!—there was a property that screamed out for 3-D treatment, it is Danger Girl.

2) *Spider-Man/Black Cat* writer Kevin Smith swears it's coming. "It's coming," he says. See?

KS also says, "Our new movie, 'Jersey Girl,' got in the way of the comic scripts, so it's completely my fault—*mea culpa, mea culpa*. Rest assured, it'll be done one day—hopefully sooner than it took to finish DC's *Camelot 3000* mini-series from way back when."

In fact, that ties into Smith's personal guarantee. "That might be a great date to shoot for—year 3000," he says. "I swear on my soul it'll be done by the year 3000."

Dear Wizard,

I'm an aspiring comic book artist currently in high school. I have a good amount of skill for my age, but only a vague amount of information about the comic biz. I would really appreciate some insight into my trade of choice in the form of answers to these questions:

1) I often feel as if I draw too slow. About how long does it take an artist to finish a page?

2) I recall hearing somewhere that the comic book business does not pay enough to live on. Is this true? How much does the average artist get paid?

Sarou Armstrong
crowned80heights@aol.com

1) The standard is a page a day. Live with it, or find another line of work.

2) The only average is that there is no average. Penciling page rates can vary from "free" (some people will do the work for nothing just to get published to start) to $500 a page or so. A decent rule-of-thumb beginner rate is anywhere from $75-$150/page.

And see below for yet more on your trade of choice. And maybe even a collaborator...

Hi, J.!

1) Is it me, or was *Danger Girl's 3-D Special*, like, the best comic EVER? I mean, have you seen it?

2) Whatever happened to the *Spider-Man/Black Cat: The Evil That Men Do* mini-series? I snatched up the first two issues, and I thought it was a great edgy read. But I can't find the others. And according to your price guide, they didn't publish any more.

Hello Jim,

So I've made the fatal mistake of trying to become a comic writer. The main problem seems to be that to "break in," you typically need to collaborate with an artist. Unfortunately, every artist you stumble upon is really, really busy or just can't bother with an industry nobody (uh, that would be me).

Where does one locate young up-and-comers that are hungry and also looking for a break? Is there a cave somewhere near an art college where they hide? I've got some great ideas that

HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...

Like a title? Hate a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

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I'd love to share—it's just finding able artists that is difficult.

Richard Zaric
zaric@mts.net

You're on to something. "Send a letter to people that teach or are administrators at an art school," recommends Peter Gross, a veteran DC/Vertigo artist and (wouldn't ya know it?) art school teacher. "Any e-mail sent to even a general mailbox at a school will usually get forwarded to the right people."

Gross oughtta know. He teaches at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, one of four accredited U.S. schools that have specialty comic art programs. The others are the Savannah School of Art and Design (Savannah, Ga.), the School of Visual Arts in New York, and the Joe Kubert School in Dover, NJ.

Persistence also pays off. "Dude, it took me *10* years to 'Forrest Gump' my way into comics," says über-writer Brian Michael Bendis. "There's no textbook way to do it, but you can't do it sitting in your basement wondering. Keep lobbing whatever you can at the wall. Sooner or later, you will meet the right people."

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Dear Wizard,

My pick for "Great Unknown" comics, following up on your article in *Wizard* #139:

• *Black Magic M-66.* Masamune Shirow's first work is still a classic. It's all there: the great art, realistic dialogue, and a well thought-out world and technology. But this one has the benefit of a faster, more action-packed story without the dense information overload and intricate (some would say incomprehensible) plotlines of his more recent *Ghost in the Shell 2* series. This is the reason why I love the work of Shirow.

• *Amazing Spider-Man Annual #20.* Spidey vs. Iron Man 2020 features all-around kickass action, great art, and the weight of tragedy.

• *Beware of Dog, Ninja High School Vol. 2.* A compilation of four stories from the golden age of *Ninja High School*, back when Ben Dunn wrote and did the artwork. The plots were straightforward fun, the homage to Japanese culture was clever and the jokes were uproarious. I defy you to read the story that gives this graphic novel its name and *not* laugh your ass off.

And my personal fave…

• *Nick Fury vs. S.H.I.E.L.D.* I still don't know why fanboys aren't talking about this as a classic. Great art, a vast conspiracy that boggles the mind, a secret enemy with an even more secretive plan that keeps you guessing till the very end, action that results in a body count that would shock even today's readers, gonzo S.H.I.E.L.D. gadgets and Nick Fury kicking major amounts of *gluteus maximus* across the world and into space! This one should be on everyone's must-read list.

Mike Costantino
mcspiderman@aol.com

Y'know, I've never read *any* of the above. That's the best

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QUICK HITS

CREATORS' LAST LICKS AT JIM!

As I write these tear-strained words, I can scarcely believe it! Jim ending a 107-issue stint of shepherding "Magic Words"? How much trauma can mankind bear?

—Stan Lee, Marvel Comics Founding Father

I don't know who you are or why you keep writing to me. Good luck doing whatever it is you do, which apparently has something to do with urinating.

—Jeph Loeb, *Batman* scribe

Awesome! So yer finally going legit! Now send me back my damn bathrobe. Seriously, good luck with that other (udder) company. Pie's in the mail!

—Jim Lee, *Batman* artist

What, I only have two sentences to tell you what an incredible job you did with this column over the last million years? Did that last sentence count?

—Terry Moore, *Strangers in Paradise* creator

Jim, you're one of the finest people I know. Sexy, too. Godspeed, my friend!

—Chris Bachalo, *Uncanny X-Men* artist

Your letter column has been totally awesome! Good luck with everything in the future, Jake Mackelstein!

—Geoff Johns, *JSA* and *Flash* writer

Jim who?

—Mark Waid, *Fantastic Four* writer

Jim, you made "Magic Words" such a guilty pleasure. I'll miss your sarcastic comments and acid-laced invective. Oh, wait! No I won't. You'll be editing my stuff at Top Cow.

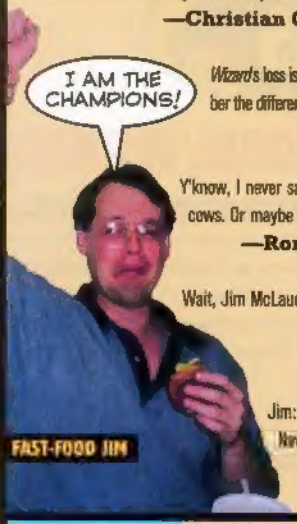
—Paul Dini, comics and animation writer

This is a sad, sad day in the history of Jim McLauchlin, but a great day in the history of *Wizard* magazine.

—Mark Millar, Scottish wise-ass

Mac, when we heard you were leaving *Wizard* and going over to Top Cow, we were in shock and awe. We're gonna miss your "Magic Words!"

—Christian Gossett, *The Red Star* creator



Wizard's loss is ultimately Taco Bell's gain. As long as you remember the difference between hard and soft shell, you'll do fine, Jim!

—Dan Jurgens, *Thor* writer

Y'know, I never saw you as a cow man. Sheep maybe, but not cows. Or maybe ferrets.

—Ron Marz, *Sojourn*, *Scion* writer

Wait, Jim McLauchlin's been doing this letter column?

—Joe Quesada, Marvel Editor-in-Chief

Jim: Please get your ass over here and get to work.
Now. Thanks.

—Marc Silvestri, Top Cow founder

thing about "unknown" lists—share one with a friend and some great stuff is suddenly "known."

Jim-boree,

Based on your comments about a spandex-clad Strawberry Shortcake '80s revival in *Wizard* #140, your next Halloween Costume Contest will probably be full of photos of kinky, pseudo-pornographic "bad-girl" updates of Strawberry Shortcake.

Steven Paradise
Salt Lake City, UT

Dear God, I hope so.

Dear Jim McLauchlin,

I'm an amateur writer who's been reading *Wizard* for 10 years. Even though *Wizard* continually brings tears to my eyes, they are usually tears of laughter and joy. I now feel the need to write you over tears of another kind.

In issue #135, your "Unmasking Batman" article about the life of uncredited Batman co-creator Bill Finger brought to the forefront the issue of credit where credit is due. It is now you and your magazine that deserve credit. As someone who has immersed himself in the world of Batman so many times, I found it unfortunate that I—and I'd guess many others—have remained ignorant of Bill Finger's vital contributions for so long. And it breaks my heart that he died unfulfilled. I read your article and felt deeply for Bill Finger.

Yes, the information on current and upcoming projects in *Wizard* is always nice. Yes, the jokes are funny. But this article was worth more than all the current events, one-liners, and previews combined.

I feel this article gave the greatest gift of all—the human touch. I now feel I can relate to Bill Finger in some small way. And as someone who feels that way, I'm sure that somewhere in the Great Beyond, Bill Finger appreciates your article even more than I.

I remain a loyal reader of *Wizard* magazine.

Michael Casey
Nightwing@freeonline.com

And that's about that.

If there's one small thing I'd like to pass along in passing, it's this:

Everything I've done here in 107 issues, and everything the rest of the staff here has done in 140+ issues is...more than might meet the eye. People tend to have a "snapshot" view of many things in life, a mental shorthand broken down to a single characteristic. And the snapshot of this magazine in general and perhaps this column in particular falls under the general heading of "smart-ass."

Guilty as charged.

But there's another side as well, typified by things such as "Unmasking Batman." You can decide for yourself which is the main course and which is the side dish, but there's a *real* heapin' helpin' of stuff other than just smart-ass going on here.

Seriously. Look back, and look beyond the one-liners. We've addressed serious criticism of ourselves and

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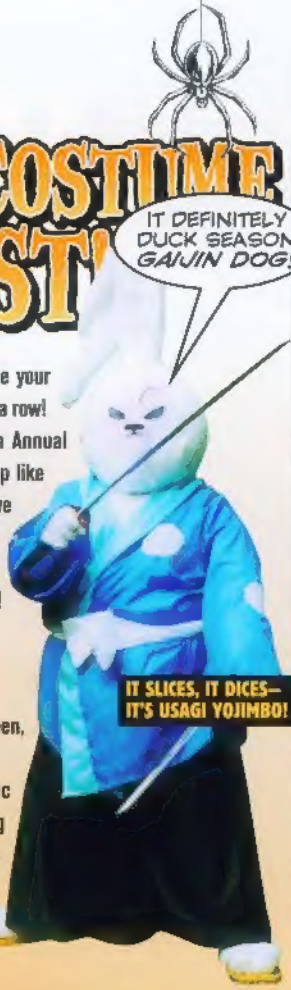
12TH ANNUAL HALLOWEEN COSTUME CONTEST!



Halloween's practically here and we want you to share your Halloween experience with *Wizard* for the 12th year in a row!

That's right, *Wizard* is officially kicking off its 12th Annual Halloween Costume Contest and we need YOU to dress up like your favorite character to win big, big prizes! Winners receive over $1,000 in comic-related merchandise, including cool statues, Xbox, PS2 and GameCube video games, DVDs, rare action figures, signed comic books and much, much more!

HERE'S DA DEAL

Create the most amazing costume the world has ever seen, but remember to follow these four simple rules:

1) Dress up like anyone (or anything) you want--comic book character, video game character, something out of a book or movie, whatever (the more original your outfit, the better your chances of winning). Just look at the Usagi Yojimbo and Green Lantern here on this very page!

2) The actual costume itself must be HOMEMADE, but you can add store-bought items to spice up your outfit. For example, you can go out and buy a badass mace for your original Hawkman costume.

3) Have someone photograph you in your costume (Polaroids will NOT be accepted!), then write your name, age, full address, e-mail, phone number and name of the character you're dressed as on a small piece of paper, ATTACH IT TO THE BACK OF THE PHOTO (DON'T WRITE ON THE PHOTO!), and send it to the address below. All photos must be color prints, and PLEASE take multiple shots with you in multiple poses just in case some of your pictures are indecipherable. And above all, remember that magic five-letter word: "focus."

4) To be eligible to win, WE MUST RECEIVE YOUR PHOTO BY AUGUST 15, 2003, so get sewin'!

Send your entry to:
COSTUME CONTEST 12
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WIN OVER $1,000 IN COMIC SWAG!

our publication in this column. There's been a real message of open-mindedness and tolerance. There's been a SERIOUS and very conscious message that educating oneself, constantly and over the course of a lifetime, is highly important. Trust me, it's there. I *know*—I've written the words.

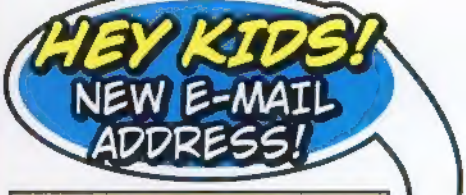
And I know it works. There are two kinds of gratification that come from reading 300,000 or so letters. One is when someone says, "Hey, that fart joke on page 53 had me laughing for hours." The other is when someone writes in and says, "Y'know, I never even *heard* of Will Eisner until that article you guys just wrote." I get both those types of gratification. And I gotta tell you—they're both nice. But the latter is better.

So there you go. No choruses of "Happy Trails" necessary—'cause the beat goes on. Join us next month in *Wizard* #0, when some new punk takes over the column. I know him personally, and know him to not be a jerk. Treat him as well as you've treated me and we'll all get along just fine. No one will even get hurt. Well, unless they run with scissors. Always a bad idea, that.

That's all I got. So long, and thanks for all the pie. I remain...

—Jim McLauchlin

Ladies and gentlemen, Jim McLauchlin has left the building!



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SIX PACK OF SCUM

Bendis cracks open the Ultimate version of the Sinister Six

AMERICAN TAIL What exactly is Captain America trying to hide?

Insomnia would make anyone cranky, but after five days without sleep, Brian Michael Bendis got downright sinister.

After his first child was born last December, Bendis refused to sleep. Virtually every thought was about his new daughter. Every thought except one—the Ultimate Sinister Six. According to the *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer, as his wife finally coaxed him to sleep, he dreamt up a plan to introduce a team of Spider-Man's greatest foes into the Ultimate Universe. The longtime group of Spider-Man's deadliest enemies—Sandman, Electro, Vulture, Kraven, Mysterio and Doctor Octopus, collectively known as the Sinister Six (**see sidebar**)—had yet to be brought into the Ultimate Universe, but introducing them was a task Bendis wasn't even sure he was up for.

"Originally, I pitched this to Marvel not knowing if I'd even write it," said Bendis of September's six-issue miniseries, *The Six*. "It's

a story too big for *Ultimate Spider-Man*. It's thematically too big. There are some problems so big that Peter Parker can't handle them—he's The Six's bitch."

But Bendis eventually did sign on to script the series, which he says will see Ultimate Spider-Man take on trouble so big, the 15-year-old hero will need to call in some big guns.

"That's where the Ultimates come in," teased Bendis, who's written an original six page prologue to the series, which will be penciled by Marvel's Editor in-Chief Joe Quesada and published next month exclusively in *Wizard* #0 (available July 30). People always want to know how the Ultimate Universe connects and this series will do that in a big way. This problem becomes a S.H.I.E.L.D. problem and therefore becomes an Ultimates problem."

With art by Trevor Hairsine (*Captain America*) and covers by John Cassaday, the series is officially titled *The Ultimates/Ultimate Spider-Man. The Six*. The series will see a number of Spider-Man's villains from *Ultimate Spider-Man* teaming after the baddies have been detained by S.H.I.E.L.D.

"You'll see Doc Ock, Norman Osborn and Electro, but there's also going to be the introduction of some new people," explained Bendis. "All these people are being detained for reasons we'll reveal in issue #1. And Norman [Osborn] isn't a stupid guy—these aren't dumb guys. When they get it together and decide who to go after, it's quite intriguing."

Starring everyone from Spider-Man to Captain America to Iron Man and the Black Widow, *The Six*, according to Bendis, will *ultimately* be a showcase for how each of the Ultimate titles connects as well as how Ultimate Spidey and the Ultimates relate.

"The fun part is really showing how Spider-Man and the Ultimates view each other," admitted Bendis. "It's pretty shocking for [The Ultimates] to find out he's just a kid. We get a lot of humor out of that. But more than that, it's also about Captain America dealing with the legacy of his super-soldier serum—all these freaks have risen out of the research trying to recreate him."

Bendis also revealed that thanks to *Ultimates* writer Mark Millar, the series will advance the stories currently being told in the ongoing *Ultimates* title.

"With the generosity of Mark, this series pushes a lot of the Ultimates into areas we haven't seen before, including some stuff with Giant-Man and the Wasp," said Bendis. "This is essential *Ultimate Spider-Man* reading and, hopefully, essential *Ultimates* reading as well. If you're a fan of the book, you'll get all of them."

While Bendis wants to keep most of the details of the series secret, he did reveal that the series itself will never see the new villainous team actually called the Sinister Six.

"No one would ever call themselves 'sinister,'" chuckled the scribe. "You'll never see the words 'Sinister Six' in this series. Norman Osborn doesn't think he's sinister; he thinks he's a victim. This is very different. This could even be a one-time thing. I'm not sure we can ever accomplish it again. This could be the first and last appearance of the Ultimate version of the Sinister Six." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

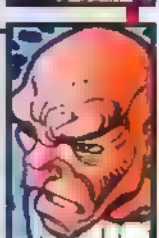
SIX APPEAL

With *The Six* writer Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) only revealing that Doc Ock, Norman Osborn and Electro will be part of the new Ultimate Sinister Six team, *Wizard* decided to eyeball the bad guys who might make the cut on Bendis' sinister dream team.

VENOM Having debuted in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #33, Eddie Brock is the son of the research partner who worked with Peter Parker's father helping to develop the symbiotic suit that Brock now wears as the evil--and gooey--Ultimate Venom entity. Disappearing after a knockdown, drag-out fight with Spidey, Venom could be the powerhouse hell-bent on revenge. ODDS: 3-1

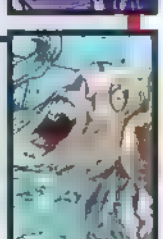
KRAVEN, THE HUNTER While a fashion abomination, Kraven's a skilled hunter and television personality who tapes his greatest hunts, including a recent safari to capture Spider-Man in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #16–#20. With a vast array of weapons and training, Kraven's looking for revenge after being publicly embarrassed in his last attempt at capturing the web-head. ODDS: 10-1

RHINO Subjected to experimental chemical and radiation treatments, the Rhino was bonded to an almost invulnerable skin with the texture of a rhinoceros hide. After making a brief cameo in a recent issue of *USM*–where Iron Man laid him out like a Thai schoolgirl–the Rhino could be the muscle The Six needs to take on Spider-Man and the Ultimates. ODDS: 12-1



THE VULTURE Although he's yet to make an Ultimate appearance, the high-flying Vulture would add a bit of old-school continuity to The Six. Wearing a harness that gives him superhuman strength and the ability to fly, the Vulture's been yelling "GET OFFA MY LAWN!" for years in the regular Marvel U. and it's about time he yelled at the sassy teens in the Ultimate-verse. ODDS: 15-1

THE LIZARD Dr. Curt Conners just wanted to find a way to regrow his missing arm, but instead was transformed into the reptilian Lizard in *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* #10. Stalking into the sewers after being defeated by Spider-Man and Ultimate Man-Thing, the Lizard would make a volatile addition to The Six. That, or he'd just dislocate his jaw and eat them. ODDS: 20-1



SANDMAN Bombarded with massive radiation, William Baker was transformed into a living, controllable mass of sand. As hard to hold onto as it is to get him out of your Speedos, the Sandman made a brief cameo in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #16, where he was being held for observation and more medical testing. Will he bust loose? ODDS: 30-1

THE BEST ARTIST YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

Marvel discovers painter extraordinaire in Italy, pairs him with Bendis

If you think Italy's only good at producing westerns, food and gangsters, think again.

Italy's become a hotbed for new artistic talent, with Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada and WildStorm founder Jim Lee making recent trips to the boot-shaped country in a quest to discover new stars.

One of the brightest stars you haven't seen through your telescope yet is newcomer Gabriele Dell'Otto, an Italian painter who will be producing a major Marvel project with writer Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) in 2004. Although the project is still top secret, Quesada said it's no secret that Dell'Otto is a rising star in comic book art circles.

"Screw him. I hate him. He's too talented," exclaimed Quesada, who helped recruit the painter to Marvel last year. "He's just too damn good. I've seen his stuff for about two years and we've been trying to work out a project but it didn't come together until now."

With a style reminiscent of the best of Alex Ross (*Kingdom Come*) and Bill Sienkiewicz (*Elektra: Assassin*), Dell'Otto's painted work in Italy includes a soon-to-be released Batman project for DC Comics. However, Quesada was quick to point out that it was unfair to draw comparisons to other superstar painters.

"He's an amalgam of so many guys' styles," explained Quesada. "But I'd never compare him to anyone else. Will he be the next Alex Ross or the next Simon Bisley? No, he's going to be the next Gabriele Dell'Otto. He's going to make his own mark. I have high hopes he's just going to define his own world."

Dell'Otto, who grew up reading Italian editions of Marvel's biggest series, said he can't remember a time where he didn't have a piece of paper and brush in front of him, and noted that being compared to Ross is an idea he can't even fathom.

"I like Alex Ross and consider him a great artist," said Dell'Otto from his home in Rome. "Sincerely, I don't think that my artwork can remind someone of Alex's work. In my view, artists are very different from one another, and they all have their good and bad sides. I just hope I live up to everyone's expectations."

The painter, who said working with Bendis represents a dream come true, has many other dream projects he'd love to take a crack at, including Daredevil and Hulk.

"I would love to paint a Wolverine graphic novel," gushed the 29-year-old. "I love to draw Wolvie and Batman—maybe a crossover Wolverine versus Batman book. What I like most about those characters is their nature, they're normal humans—just like me." ■ MC

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR Phenom artist Gabriele Dell'Otto promises to make a splash with an upcoming—and top secret—project at Marvel.

WAID'S 'EMPIRE' STRIKES BACK

Villains like Dr. Doom can never win because of the first rule of comics: Good guys never lose. Apparently, someone forgot to tell Mark Waid the rules.

In *Empire*, a six-issue mini-series from DC Comics kicking off July 30, Waid and penciler Barry Kitson (*Titans*) color way outside the lines by not only focusing on a villain, but a villain who's already got his foes pinned firmly under his boot heel. Golgoth, who Waid describes as "a beautiful Bond villain," is essentially Darkseid, Dr. Doom and Alexander the Great all wrapped into one.

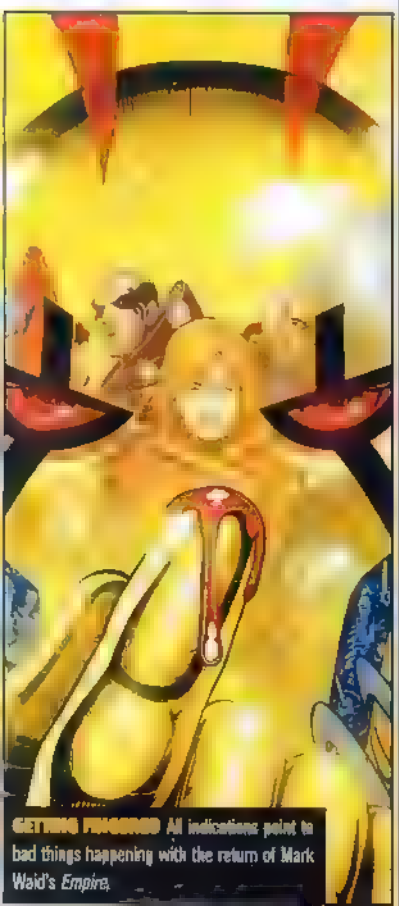
"What if the Sopranos were the cast of the 'West Wing'?" Waid mused. Like Tony Soprano, Golgoth is both inherently evil and surprisingly tragic. "There are sympathetic characters, but just as in 'Sopranos,' there's no one who's just a really good guy."

Golgoth is the first person to conquer the world, and consequently, the first person to encounter the problem of "What happens when I want to retire?" After eight years of ruling the planet, he's trying hard to not let anyone find out that he's running out of steam and ready to call it quits.

This DC installment of *Empire* is actually part three of the series, which initially launched in May of 2000 but was left unfinished due to financial woes at the now-defunct Gorilla Comics, a publishing imprint of Image. Due to the lengthy gap between issues two and three, Waid and Kitson tweaked the story a bit.

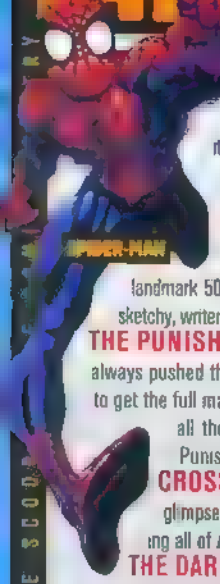
"We retooled issue #3 a little so that it would read better as a stand-alone issue #1," Waid explained. "If you only pick up issue #1, you certainly are in the world and you know what's going on. There's no question of clarity."

But fear not! For those fanboy completists, the original issues #1 and #2 were recently collected and resolicited as a #0 issue, which goes on sale June 25. ■ **TODD CASEY**



GETTING RECKONED All indications point to bad things happening with the return of Mark Waid's *Empire*.

THE BUZZBIN



NEW X-MEN Top Cow founder Marc Silvestri's highly anticipated return to the X-Men, alongside writer Grant Morrison, looks like it's getting closer to reality. Silvestri's first issue is already penciled, inked and colored and his run on *New X-Men* could reportedly begin as early as December.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN Look for big changes in the life of Peter Parker, beginning with October's landmark 500th issue of *Amazing Spider-Man*. While details are still sketchy, writer J. Michael Straczynski plans to turn the book on its head.

THE PUNISHER Garth Ennis' Marvel Knights *Punisher* series has always pushed the boundaries of a PG+ rating, but look for the book to get the full mature reader MAX treatment in 2004, which will allow all the blood, sex and violence that Ennis craves and the Punisher deserves.

CROSSGEN In order to provide readers with the ultimate glimpse at the world of Avalon, artist Jimmy Cheung is drawing all of August's *Scion* #39 in double-page spreads!

THE DARKNESS Readers may finally learn what the Darkness is all about by the end of 2003 in a three-issue mini-series called *Absolute Darkness*. Could *Absolute Witchblade* be far behind?

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS *Battle of the Planets* may be ending, but the G-Force gang won't be out of commission for long–a new series called *G-Force* is set to launch this fall from Top Cow, possibly as early as November.

GREEN LANTERN While details are being kept on the down low, sources at DC say that *Green Lantern* may be getting an overhaul in early-to-mid-2004 *a la* the treatment *Batman* received from Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb.

MARK WAID Now that he's managed to make his "mark" in comics, Mark Waid has turned his focus to animation and is currently in negotiations with the Cartoon Network for a new series that he'll write.

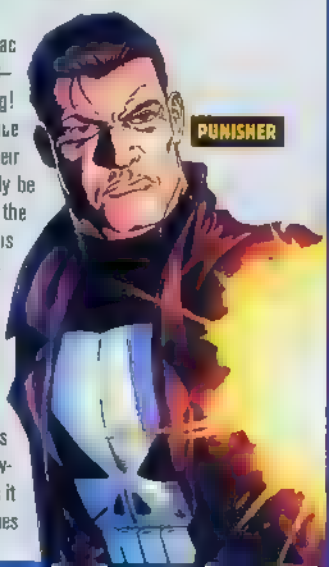
DANIEL WAY Shock writer Daniel Way's next Marvel "victim" may be Ant-Man, which Way will spill in a new Marvel MAX mini-series later this year.

DC COMICS A new line of mature readers titles, completely disconnected from the DCU but not under the Vertigo umbrella, is in the works at DC, sources indicate. Kelley Puckett (*Batgirl*) and Steve Gerber (*Howard the Duck*) are already rumored to be working on titles for the new imprint.

TOP COW Spinning out from the events of the "Endgame" crossover, the mysterious team known as EVO is tentatively slated to receive its own ongoing series in November. Word on the street is that *EVO* will be the first regular penciling gig for *Magdalena* artist Eric Basaldua.

BRATH Barbarian chief Brath Mac Garen lost his Sigil in *Brath* #3–and that's only the beginning! October's *Mystic* #41 will continue the trend of characters losing their Sigils, and the cause will finally be revealed: A Sigil hunter is on the loose! Rumor has it that this development may have consequences that could lead to a major Sigil shakeup in 2004.

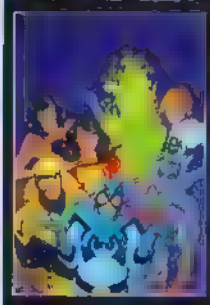
AGENT X Don't roll out the coffin for *Agent X* just yet–there are signs that the series may continue for another three issues past June's issue #12 before bowing out for good. And rumor has it that a brand new *Deadpool* series won't be far behind!



HOT READS

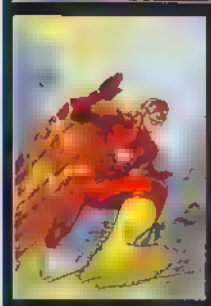
5 books we can't wait to pick up

Every month at *Wizard*, our editors read through hundreds of comic books. And like all fans, we get psyched about upcoming storylines and creative changes. Here are the five books that we're champing at the bit to read–and reasons why you should pick them up, too!

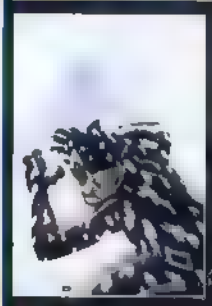


FORMERLY KNOWN AS JUSTICE LEAGUE #1 (DC) This mini-series reunites the creative team of Keith Giffen, J.M. DeMatteis and Kevin Maguire, the trio responsible for making superheroes hilarious in the 1990s version of *Justice League*. With reluctant, tongue-in-cheek crusaders like Blue Beetle, Booster Gold and Elongated Man leading the charge, *Formerly Known As* will bring the funny like a Three Stooges marathon on crack!

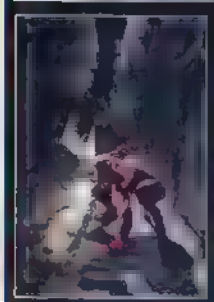
EMPIRE #1 (DC) Bring on the bad guys! We've often said that many villains aren't used to their full potential in comics, but Mark Waid's got the cure for that problem–he made his antagonist the star of the book! Golgoth's an evil dictator who's taken over the world and destroyed all opposition. But it ain't easy keeping the trains running when everyone you rule fears and/or hates you–which should make for some kickass comic stories!



FLASH #200 (DC) This is the ish that writer Geoff Johns has been building to since he took over this title almost four years ago–The Flash vs. Zoom! It's a deadly race against the one foe that's hurt the Flash legacy the most. Will Wally West rise to the challenge, or will he be ground under the hooves of his opposite number? And make no mistake–the outcome radically changes everything you think you know about the Flash!



CATWOMAN #21 (DC) Captain Cold has quickly become one of our favorite villains over the past two years, so when he blackmails Selina Kyle, a.k.a. Catwoman, into pulling a major score in Keystone City, you *know* we're tagging along for the caper! But as Selina soon finds, the cops in Keystone have a chilly reception planned for her and Cold. Wonder how cats hold up against frostbite?



DAREDEVIL #49 (Marvel Knights) The showdown you've been dying to see since Brian Michael Bendis took the *DD* gig–the Man Without Fear versus his Public Enemy #1, the deadly assassin known as Bullseye! In the second-to-last chapter of the "Hardcore" storyarc, the two mortal foes square off once again. But what's Bullseye's role in this drama? How does he fit in with Kingpin's plans to use Typhoid Mary to rebuild his mob empire? Argh! The suspense is killing us!

WOLVERINE GOES COW-TIPPIN'

Marvel lends Logan to Top Cow in trade for Marc Silvestri

Marc Silvestri for Wolverine—talk about your blockbuster trades!

As part of the deal that freed up Top Cow founder Marc Silvestri to pencil four issues of Grant Morrison's *New X-Men*, Top Cow has announced that Marvel's fan-favorite mutant will hook up with Witchblade for the first of two intercompany crossovers published by the Cow. Tentatively slated for a spring 2004 release, *Wolverine/Witchblade* will reunite the two characters for the first time since Marvel and Top Cow's "Devil's Reign" crossover event in 1997.

According to Top Cow President Matt Hawkins, the crossovers were part of the plan from the very beginning.

"That was the whole point of the deal in the first place," confirmed Hawkins. "I went to [Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe] Quesada and said we wanted to do crossovers. 'Devil's Reign' was really successful, so hey, let's do something again!"

The agreement states that Silvestri will do a four-issue X-stint, and Top Cow can pick any characters from the entire Marvel roster (except for Spider-Man) for a pair of crossovers. Needless to say, the ol' Canucklehead topped the list.

"Out of the seven 'Devil's Reign' books, *Wolverine/Witchblade* was the most popular and best selling," explained Hawkins, "so it seemed like a natural one to go back to."

As for the second crossover? "I know we've bandied about Darkness/Hulk, and obviously the perfect guy for that would be Dale Keown. But everything's still very much up in the air."

Another thing that's up in the air is the story for *Wolverine/Witchblade*, largely because the creative team hasn't been assigned yet. But one thing is for sure—Top Cow wants only the best. "My pie-in-the-sky writer would be somebody along the lines of Mark Millar, Mark Waid, Grant Morrison or Garth Ennis," said Hawkins. "Someone that's going to do a really cool job with it. I'd like to get away from the old cliché crossover where the two characters meet, fight, realize they're on the same side and team up to beat the real bad guy—and I think each of those guys I mentioned would have a cool new way to approach it."

As for the artist? "Both crossover projects will probably be done by up-and-coming Top Cow artists, guys like Eric Basaldua and Francis Manapul," revealed Hawkins. "These are going to be such high-profile gigs that if we put Eric or Francis on them and they do a great job, it might just be the spark that ignites their careers. Remember, *Witchblade* first spun out of the *Shi/Cyblade* crossover, and Mike Turner broke out on that book. So there's a lot of potential for a character and a creator to make their big splash on these projects." ■

NEWSFLASHES

JUMP MANIA

Titled "Avengers Forever" the two-issue arc sees [illegible] of blood-sucking vampires and features art by Jim Calafiore.

MONA AVERY

[illegible] which launches in September from Top Cow.

RANGEL WAR

[illegible]

RISING STAR

[illegible] *Everyday Magic*), and the featured character will be Laurel Darkhaven.

IMAGE COMICS

[illegible] own ends.

THE MAXX

[illegible] classic *The Maxx* will have reason to celebrate as [illegible] collecting the series, available for the first time. *The Maxx: Book One* will feature the first six issues of the [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] ers that contained creases and folds, which were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

CHARACTER TO WATCH

KINGPIN

Crime doesn't pay, right? Wrong—just ask the Kingpin.

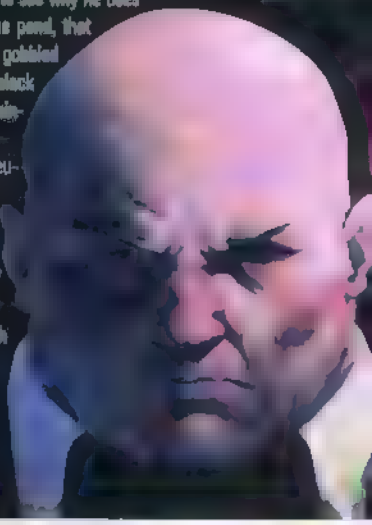
After years of tormenting everyone from Daredevil to Spider-Man to the Punisher, Wilson Fisk—the Kingpin of New York crime—finally gets his own ongoing Marvel series in June by writer Bruce Jones (*Hulk*) and *Sleeper* artist Sean Phillips.

The title will trace the Kingpin's bloody rise from young street thug to the top of the New York underworld.

"We're not trying to make you feel empathy for the Kingpin," said series editor Axel Alonso. "But as the story goes along, into the second arc, you'll begin to see why he does things. And even though he's the biggest shark in the pond, that doesn't mean there aren't guppies along the way to be gobbled up. You'll see him evolve from the street thug in a black trench coat into the guy we know today in the white pin-striped suit."

After being stabbed by a number of his traitorous lieutenants last year, the Kingpin's alter finally returned to the pages of *Daredevil*. After transforming Typhoid Mary and her multiple personalities back to her evil ways, the Kingpin will play an integral role in the current "Hardcore" storyline, which climaxes with July's issue #50.

"This story leads to a very big turning point for both Daredevil and the Kingpin," admitted *DD* scribe Brian Michael Bendis. "If you're a fan of either one, you don't want to miss what happens by the end of issue #50—everything changes for both of them."



HEAT INDEX

No one loves comics like *Wizard*, and here's some cool things we read and saw this month.

GOTHAM CENTRAL (DC) Watching Detective Renee Montoya unravel before your eyes holds all the fascination of a horrible train wreck. It's disturbing, but you can't help but watch as this tough-as-nails cop dodges a murder charge and also deals with being outed as a lesbian at the precinct. Great cop drama by Greg Rucka and Michael Lark.

CAL MCDONALD CRIMINAL MACABRE (Dark Horse) The *30 Days of Night* team of writer Steve Niles and artist Ben Templesmith hit paydirt again with this darkly eerie story of an L.A. detective investigating the city's occult crimes, including a devious pact between a werewolf, vampire and human that'll keep readers glued to (and shaking in) their seats. With art that's just as unsettling as the series' story and witty dialogue, this book is a horror must-read.

JSA ALL-STARS (DC) The first chapter of this eight-part *JSA* mini-series event did something we didn't think possible—it improved on the monthly *JSA* series. With the JSA's original members separated from the group's newest teammates, this series kicked into high gear as the young members struggle to overcome the things they fear most. With gorgeous art by Sal Velluto and a spot-on story by writers Geoff Johns and David Goyer, the first issue's climactic ending had us begging for more.

BATGIRL: YEAR ONE (DC) Issue #6, which foreshadows the relationship between Birds of Prey teammates Black Canary and Oracle (Barbara Gordon), boasted a breakneck motorcycle chase through the Gotham streets, Black Canary kicking butt in fishnets and a Green Arrow cameo. For those who think girls, especially those in fishnets, can't rock, this ish will be an equal rights wake-up call!

ARKHAM ASYLUM: LIVING HELL (DC) Billionaire scam artist Warren White thought he'd beat the system by pleading insanity, but he learns quickly that Gotham City's Arkham Asylum is the last place you wanna be banished to. Writer Dan Slott and penciler Ryan Sook created renditions of the Joker, Riddler and Two-Face that were so chilling, we were scared straight.

WIZARD #0 ARRIVES!

Hold on tight to this issue of *Wizard*—because the magazine will never look the same again.

A new era of publishing kicks off next month at Wizard Entertainment with *Wizard* #0, an event unlike any other in the history of *Wizard: The Comics Magazine*. The magazine undergoes a complete transformation, featuring a new look, new columns and departments and original content the likes of which has never been seen.

How big is it? Just take a look.

EXCLUSIVE, ORIGINAL COMICS

Not one but two original tales—that you will only read here!—by two of the hottest creative teams in comics. Owners of the No. 1-selling comic like a bazillion months running, Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb offer up a Bat-tale featuring Catwoman that fits seamlessly between *Batman* #616-#617. Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada and *Wizard*'s No. 1 writer Brian Michael Bendis counter with an *Ultimate Spider-Man* story about the Ultimate version of the Sinister Six (**see p. 16-17**).

A BRAND NEW LOOK

Featuring the first *Wizard* redesign in nearly five years, the magazine gets a brand new look, complete with new columns and departments focusing on the topics you care the most about.

BIGGER, BETTER, BADDER

Check out the expanded price guide featuring 26 percent more pages, complete with collecting oriented sidebars to help you assemble the ultimate collection.

There's also more feature pages—including George Pérez's *JLA/Avengers* Diary, the Best Artists in Comics and the Top 100 X Men Comics of All Time.

'SPIDER-MAN 2' SET VISIT

Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst and *Wizard*. Talk about your threesomes. We take you in-person to our FIRST official visit on the set of "Spider-Man 2," for an exclusive look at filming for what is guaranteed to be the biggest movie of 2004.

TOP-NOTCH COMIC ART GALORE

It starts with the Batman/Spider-Man jam cover by Jim Lee and Joe Quesada, continues with original art openers by Adam Kubert, the legendary Neal Adams and phenom Gabrielle Dell'Otto—a young artist so hot that Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada traveled halfway around the world to Italy to recruit him (**see p. 18**)—and rises to a crescendo with a "Basic Training" lesson by ultra-hot artist Michael Turner.

AN INCENTIVE OFFER LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

After you read our feature on the Top 100 X-Men Comics of All-Time, you'll have a chance to own some of them as *Wizard Presents the Best X Men Comics of All-Time, Vol. 1*, a 250-page hardcover that represents the first trade collection in Wizard Entertainment history that features reprints of *actual* Marvel Comics. You'll have to buy *Wizard* #0, just to get this exclusive, one-of-kind incentive offer.

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and were cast the fault of the publisher.

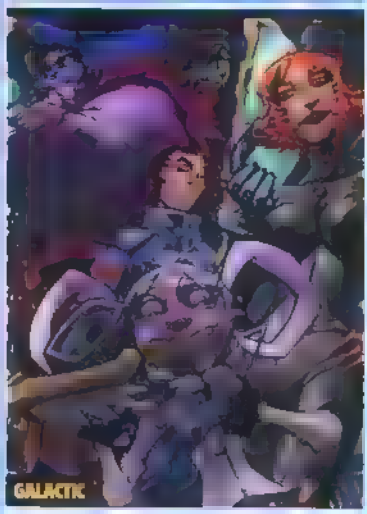
[illegible]

series, writer Ron Zimmerman returns to Marvel with

According to Zimmerman, the July-shipping one-shot will focus on what it's like to be the Fantastic Four's first line of defense but also its loneliest member.

DARK HORSE Dark Horse's Rocket line continues in August with the debut of *Galactic*, an all-new ongoing series written by Jen Krueger.

teenager targeted by an intergalactic superteam who recruit him to join their ranks.



[illegible]

New York Times bestseller George R. R. Martin's *The Hedge Knight*, the Image-affiliated studio has signed on to create adaptations for two more fantasy authors—

by Sean Jordan and art by Mike Kaluta, and the mini-series based on Williams' *The Burning Mine* will be drawn by Brett Booth with a writer to be determined. Both Raaning Studios series are slated to launch in early 2004.

DRAGONLANCE Raaning Studios has finalized

Dungeons and Dragons universe.

IMAGE COMICS

(*Nowhereville*) and artist Mike Hawthorne (*Terra*

Whiskey Tickel, International Cowgirl which follows the

success as a rodeo queen, astronaut, diplomat and movie star.

CORRECTION

Geoff Johns has not signed on to write a "Metal Men" screenplay for Warner Bros. No script writer has been commissioned yet for the proposed film.

CRANK CALLS

Phone fun we had this month

With Mazda's sizzling new RX-8 from "X2" leaping off the screen and into your local automobile dealership, *Wizard* decided to call a local showroom to get the scoop on the hottest set of wheels this side of Professor X's wheelchair.

WIZARD: Hey, I'm calling about the new RX-8 I saw it in "X2."

MAZDA DEALER: Excuse me?

You know, "X2" the most groundbreaking comic book film of all time?

Oh, yeah.

Did you see it?

No.

It might help you sell the car if you saw the movie.

Thanks, I'll check it out. How can I help you?

I was wondering, is the RX-8 wheelchair accessible?

Are you in a wheelchair?

No, but my professor is and he doesn't get out much. He's got a lot on his mind. Maybe I could bring him by for a test drive?

You want him to drive?

No, I'd drive, dude. But we'd have to lift him into the car.

Well, we don't have any in stock right now.

Really?

Yeah, we had two and they're gone—out...of...here!

Wow, well maybe when you get some in we can come by. We can fit his wheelchair, right?

Mmmmmmmm...these are pretty small cars. I don't think so.

What about this communication device I read about that's in the dashboard...is that like a mini-Cerebro?

What's a Cerebro? Is that a cell phone?

You should really see "X2."

Can I help you with anything else?

It's made out of metal, right?

The car?

Yeah.

Well, yes.

Okay, well my archenemy controls metal, so why should I buy this car?

I have to go now. Do you want a brochure sent to you? **[illegible]**

CAST PARTY *Ultimate X-Men* artist Adam Kubert signed everything from comics to casts as he helped raise $3,550 for the National Childhood Cancer Foundation with a retailer signing at Comic Book Ink in Tacoma, Wash., co-sponsored by *Wizard* and Dynamic Forces. The appearance coincided with Free Comic Book Day and the debut of "X2" and Kubert also managed to take in a screening of the movie with local residents and embark on a one-day motorcycle excursion in the Great Northwest.

GIRLS GONE WILD

With the return of *Magdalena* this summer, the revival of *Aphrodite IX* this fall and the launch of an *EVO* ongoing by the end of the year, it seems the folks over at Top Cow are hell-bent on bringing back every last babe from its past.

Can't decide which foxy vixen is the hottest Cow chick? Relax, fanboy. We'll give you everything you need to make an informed and scientific choice—and we'll even get *Witchblade* scribe David Wohl (who knows a thing or two about sexy Top Cow ladies) to toss in his two cents.

MAGDALENA

35-21-33

The latest sister of the Order of Mary Magdalene to take on the mantle of the Magdalena, this fiery warrior is dedicated to keeping the world's ancient supernatural forces at bay.

Angelic skin, sinful curves and a face that'll have you running to confession.

Sleek leather battle gear with a Christian bent.

A rooftop catfight between the Magdalena and a shapely undead demon in *Witchblade* #62 ends with our devout heroine skewering the baddie with the Spear of Destiny! Makes you think twice about skipping church, huh?

"She's way ahead of the others in the 'Mom will like her' factor, being a nun and all."

APHRODITE IX

36-19-36

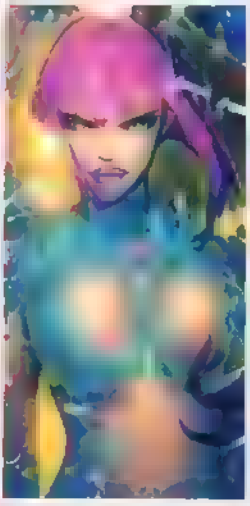
A programmable killer robot with killer looks that forgets everything after a hit, this unwitting assassin struggles to learn her true origins and discover who's pushing her buttons.

A voluptuous pair of—uh, guns, and a rear unit that just won't quit. Outstanding flexibility and stamina. Oh, and she forgets everything in the morning.

Torn white tank top, short skirt, knee-high combat boots.

Our green-haired firecracker seduced a skeevy councilman into a late-night ride on a hoversled in issue #1 of the first *Aphrodite IX* mini-series, then slits his throat! Talk about an aggressive woman.

"She will never age. No sagging, no wrinkles, she's just perfect, day after day, year after year."



RAYLA (FROM 'EVO')

38-22-32

A bitchy yet oh-so-saxy member of a powerful team of relic hunters from the year 5030, Rayla's genetic structure is intricately tied to the scarred Earth of her future.

Stylish pink hair and a rack for the ages—not to mention a pair of genetically perfect legs.

A strange form of organic body armor that leaves little to the imagination.

During a heist gone sour in *EVO* #1, Rayla tosses one of her deadly throwing stars at a teammate who's about to be captured by the authorities, killing him without batting an eye! Man, that's just cold!

"Rayla's tough enough to win a fight with the other two in a big pit filled with Jell-O. If you're looking for a girl that would look good fighting in food, she's the one."

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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

DC's excellent *Superman: Red Son* Elseworlds series explores what would happen if the Man of Steel's rocket had landed in the former Soviet Union instead of the U.S. While the story is one of the best Elseworlds to date, it got us to thinking how the Super landscape would've changed if Clark Kent was indeed a commie.

SPORTS
No way the U.S. Olympic hockey team wins in 1980.

THREADS
In order to change into Superman, Clark's gotta stand in line for six weeks to use the phone booth.

MOVIES
Chevy Chase and Dan Akroyd buy it at the end of "Spies Like Us."

VILLAINS
Initials "LL" for arch foe replaced by "BB"- Boris Badenov.

BEVERAGES
A White Russian, or—if he's feeling a bit randy—a Black Russian.

MOTTO
"Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, change the course of mighty rivers and break capitalist pig Bill Gates with his bare hands!"

INSIGNIA
Trades in weird-shaped "S" thing for big fur hat.

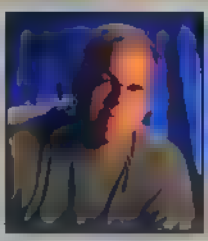
SQUEEZE
Kicks Lois to the curb and shows them two minxes in T.A.T.U. why he's called Man of Steel.

POWERS
Heat Vision replaced by Alcohol Breath.

CRY
"Look. ..up in the sky! It's a birdski! It's a planeski! It's Supermanski!"

5 QUESTIONS WITH...

GREG RUCKA



Greg Rucka just can't stop talking. With current gigs on Marvel's *Wolverine*, Oni's *Queen & Country* and an upcoming stint on DC's *Wonder Woman*, the usually stoic writer just won't shut up about anything from Amazons to mutants. *Wizard* caught up with the scribe to figure out how Captain America broke his heart and why his dad worried about his "Star Wars" obsession.

Have you ever missed out on a comic book writing gig you really wanted?

The one time I chased after a job, I didn't get it. It was *Captain America*. It disappointed me bitterly. Now, I'm okay with it because I figure that there'll always be another chance. The time will come and I'll write a Cap story.

You work for Marvel, DC and Oni—if you had to choose one, who would you sign an exclusive deal with?

If I had to chain myself to one company, it would be Oni because with Oni I know that at the end of the day, the stories I wrote would be the stories as I wanted to tell them. There would never be any question of that, and with both Marvel and DC, that's not a guarantee and that's something that you know going in.

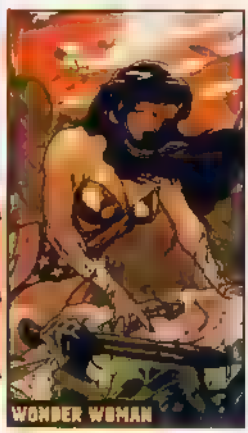
Is it true you won't use any supervillains in Wolverine?

I never ever said that I wouldn't. I said that I didn't have any plans to at this time, and until we have something new to say about Lady Deathstrike or about Sabretooth, we're not going to do it. Those stories have been told and told well—there are back issue bins for a reason. [*Wolverine* artist] Danick [Robertson] and I were talking about how cool it would be to do a story where Logan's trying to sit down and have a piece of pie and in comes Creed and just sits down opposite him and that's it. That, I haven't seen.

Do you consider your take on Wonder Woman a deconstruction, a reconstruction or an evolution?

It's probably going to be seen as a reinterpretation, but I think it was a deconstruction. We're taking her back to the core and we're asking fundamental questions. What we are focusing on is who is the woman and what is the mission, and how do you continue to try and pursue that mission when, for two reasons, you can never succeed. The first is that dramatically, you can't. Otherwise, the story is over, and the whole DC universe wraps up nicely in a bow and says, "Peace, what a way to go." [*Laughs*] The second is that it's not a viable goal. It is as impossible to achieve as Bruce Wayne going out every night as Batman saying, "Nobody dies tonight."

Is it true your father worried about the amount of time you spent watching "Star Wars" and playing roleplaying games?



I started playing roleplaying games when I was 8 in as much as you can play a roleplaying game when you're 8, which is "I killed him, I got the treasure." I've been a gamer 25 years. My dad said to me after my second novel was published, "I am so glad to see that all those comic books you bought and all that time playing roleplaying games was training for your vocation in life," and he's right. We get our inspiration in different places.

TOP 5 BUFFY COMIC STORIES WE WANNA SEE

Saying goodbye is hard to do—luckily for "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" fans, their fan-favorite vampire hunter lives on in the Dark Horse comics. With the possibility of storyarcs that would take place in continuity between episodes—or even seasons—here are the top five stories Wizard wants to see now that the "Buffy" TV show has gone off the air.

1 THE GRIM RIPPER

For years, series creator Joss Whedon's talked of doing a show featuring Buffy's English Watcher Rupert Giles, and a great place to start would be with the young Giles during his misspent youth when he was known simply as Ripper. "It's been pitched," said *Buffy* fan-editor Scott Allie. "I'd love to see a [John] Constantine-like take on him."

2 BUFFY: ROAD RULES

Taking a break from her Slayer duties between seasons two and three, Buffy spent time on the road as a waitress, but what fans really want to see are the adventures she encountered. "I love the idea of filling in the summer gaps," said Allie. "We've never done anything on the summer between these seasons. I'd love to get one of the writers from the show to do that."

3 HIGHWAY TO HELL

When Angel is transformed into evil alter ego Angelus, Buffy is forced to kill her longtime lover. Trapped in Hell for millennia, it's never been revealed what happened to Angel. "There were things I stayed away from because I thought Joss would get into them and Hell was one of those things," said Allie. "I think the doors are open for us to do that now."

4 FAITH: YEAR ONE

Rogue Slayer Faith didn't show up until season three, a year after she'd received her powers. What about that first year? "Anything with *Faith* would be great," admitted Allie. "The first thing Joss ever wanted to write for us was *Faith*, but instead he did *Fray*. I don't think he'd do your one, though. He'd do something about what happens to her next."

5 GIRLS GONE WILD

Buffy, Willow and Anya lap up the sun—and a few shots of tequila—on spring break. Three hip chicks, three skimpy bikinis and vampires; how can you go wrong? "That's probably something we wouldn't do," admits Allie. "I'm not sure that's Joss' vision of 'girl power.' He's voted against swimsuit issues and the like." —MC

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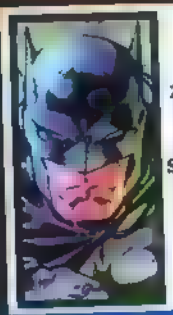

6'2"	HEIGHT	5'10"
225 lbs.	WEIGHT	165 lbs.
74"	REACH	70"
Stinking rich	FINANCIAL STATUS	Dirt poor
Cat-woman	FELINE-THEMED GIRLFRIEND	Black Cat

origins... After watching a mugger murder his parents, young Bruce Wayne embarked on a one-man war on crime, prowling the night as the brooding vigilante Batman!

Given superpowers from a radioactive spider bite, Peter Parker learned a harsh lesson about power and responsibility and now fights evil as the amazing Spider-Man!

the battle... On assignment in Gotham City for the *Daily Bugle*, photographer Peter Parker goes on some late-night web swinging and comes across Batman roughing up a thug. "Hey, tall, dark and gruesome—*ix nay* on the *eating-bay*," Spidey quips as he drops to the alleyway beside the Dark Knight. Batman ignores him. "I guess those big ears of yours are just for show," Spider-Man opines as he webs up Batman's fist, preventing him from striking the criminal. Suddenly, the wall-crawler's spider-sense warns him of danger, and he leaps onto a nearby wall just in time to avoid a cluster of Batarangs. In the confusion, Batman deploys a smoke grenade that quickly envelops the entire alleyway. "Get out of my city," Batman growls from inside the inky black cloud. "But I haven't even seen the sights yet," Spider-Man retorts as he sprays webbing in a vain attempt to snare the vigilante. Batman drops from the rooftop onto Spidey's back, sending them both tumbling into the smoke-filled alley. Disoriented, Spider-Man blindly lashes out, landing a glancing blow that nearly takes the Caped Crusader's head off. Knowing that he has to put Spider-Man down fast, Batman—moving too quickly for the Web-head to dodge—lands a nerve punch to the amazing arachnid's solar plexus. "Feel free to surrender anytime," Spidey groans as he falls to the ground, unconscious and defeated!

this month's battle by MICHAEL TURNER AND PETER STEIGERWALD

get medieval with... NEIL GAIMAN

By Mike Cotton

'Sandman' creator and 'New York Times' best-selling author Neil Gaiman unveils details behind his top-secret Marvel project, '1602'

WIZARD: 1602 is your first mainstream Marvel work and it's been shrouded in mystery for two years—now that the eight-issue mini-series is a go for September, what's it about?

GAIMAN: *1602* is genuinely set in the Marvel Universe, except that for reasons that are not immediately apparent, the Marvel Universe that we know is trying to come into existence 500 years early.

All the characters are very "early-day Marvel Universe." We're in a time period in which Sir Nicholas Fury is the head of Queen Elizabeth's intelligence organization. Dr. Stephen Strange is the Queen's physician, who also does a certain amount of magic on the side. The Witch Breed, these people with peculiar mutations, are being hunted and killed on the continent by the Inquisition. Matthew Murdock, a blind Irish street singer, is Nick Fury's number one mercenary agent. We have a young Peter Parker who is Fury's assistant; he's fascinated by spiders, but not yet been bitten by one—or by the right one.

As the story begins, strange weather is ripping the world apart. And there is a mysterious treasure that's been hidden for 500 years, and it's being brought to Dr. Strange for safekeeping. After that, it starts to get complicated.

How did the story come about?

When I agreed to write the series, we hadn't even decided what yet. Then Sept. 11, 2001 happened. I thought, "If I'm going to write something, in the mood that I'm in right now, let me list the things that I don't want in it." And I thought, "I don't want it set in New York. I don't want any skyscrapers. I don't want guns. I don't want airplanes. I don't want things to blow up." In which case, I'm telling myself to write stories that happened a long time ago. Suddenly, I got this idea for *1602* including all of the strange revelations. Part of what I liked about the idea is that it really isn't an Elseworld, *What If?*, dream, hoax or imaginary story. It's something that essentially happened and needs to be sorted out.

And the X-Men are the Witch [redacted]?

It's the original X-Men lineup. We pick up with Angel who is, I always thought, the most underrated of all the characters. What's cool is that if you're in a world in which everyone walks—there are no cars, planes, trains—suddenly, someone with wings is amazingly cool and that's more powerful. So, we meet him first, and he's just about to be burned by the Inquisition. Of course, the Inquisition—which is my "Brotherhood of Evil Mutants"—contains some familiar faces and some not so familiar.

Any Wolverine?

It would've been fun to have that second X-Men incarnation, but I thought, if we ever did a *1609*, maybe we'd have that, but for now I allowed myself no Wolverine or Storm.

But there is a Dr. Doom?

Oh, he's great fun. We're using a Doom ancestor, Otto Von Doom, known as The Handsome, and he's terribly good looking, magnificently evil and cheerfully therein. He actually is doing a lot of bad stuff in the background that gradually becomes foreground. So, I've much enjoyed writing him. We'll also learn the story of the Four Travelers in the bit that I'm writing right now in issue #5. These four people who sail away on a ship called The Fantastic and very peculiar things happen to them.

Who's your favorite character so far?

Nick Fury is the linchpin of the whole thing. Everyone knows that I love Thor and Dr. Strange, but Fury fit so perfectly here. It's much more fun writing a spy master in *1602* because he's much more hands-on. He knows more than anyone else about what's going on, except he doesn't know as much as he thinks he does which keeps biting him in the ass.

Was it tough to get a feel for the Marvel characters?

It was really fun actually. I'm enjoying it enormously. These were characters that I grew up with every bit as much as the DC characters. It was a thrill to figure out what makes them tick and why they're important. Although if I were starting from scratch, I wouldn't have been quite so enthusiastic about the number of plots I had going. Even then, I've got too many bloody characters knocking around, all of them with stories to be told. It was just me in the Marvel sandbox with my eyes bigger than my mouth.

ANGEL FOOD In *1602*, the X-Men Angel is persecuted by the Inquisition, while Peter Parker (opposite) is in the spy biz.

DC Direct and Wizard Entertainment Present:

KINGDOM COME

Design Approved by
KINGDOM COME
co-creator
ALEX ROSS!

RED ARROW

EXCLUSIVE!

In the future world of *Kingdom Come*, former teen sidekick Speedy has grown up since his days of crime-fighting alongside Green Arrow. Taking over his mentor's mantle and calling himself Red Arrow, he joins Superman's crusade in building a utopian world–putting himself and his fellow ex-Titans at odds against their former teachers who do not agree with their protégé's black-and-white outlook of the world.

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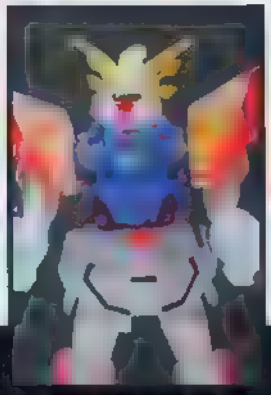
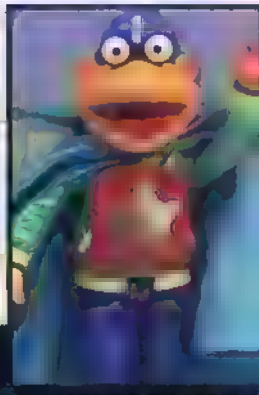


TRANSLUCENT SHINING GUNDAM

G.I. JOE: AGENT SCARLETT AND SNAKE EYES 2-PACK



SUPER SCOOTER

LEGAL BULLSEYE...

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BY MIKE COTTON

HERO WORSHIP

The greatest heroes in comics, GEORGE PÉREZ art and a KURT BUSIEK story add up to 'JLA/AVENGERS,' the most anticipated project in comics history!

Twenty years in the making, two iconic superteams and the end of the universe—the hotly anticipated *JLA/Avengers* mega project *literally* has it all.

"This has been a massive undertaking," admits writer Kurt Busiek (*Astro City*). "I'd love to make this 300 pages, but that would kill George [Pérez]. And no one will want this guy out of the picture after they see these pages."

According to Busiek, who's worked on the four-issue miniseries (each done in a 48-page Prestige Format) with artist Pérez (*Solus*) for over two years, this project will give fans everything they want out of a Marvel/DC crossover when it debuts Sept. 3.

"Remember, this is not DC versus Marvel," warns Busiek to fans that may expect a four-issue slugfest between the two teams. "Yes, the JLA and the Avengers will act independently, will act together and will act against each other. Certainly you'll see various conflicts in ways that no one will be expecting. This isn't the superhero elimination, though. It's about teams—not individuals."

Pérez, who toiled almost all of the last two years working solely on *JLA/Avengers*—even taking a sabbatical from his exclusive CrossGen contract at company president Mark Alessi's behest—explains that the 20-year wait for the miniseries lives up to the hype surrounding the project.

"I just wish I was faster," chuckles Pérez, who claims to be drawing every JLA and Avengers member in the two teams' huge rosters, totaling over 200. "Just the pressure of doing this much work can get to a person. But I've loved every minute of the actual drawing.

"I really took a look at what this project meant to my career, as well as the fan base anticipating it," continues Pérez, who's worked on both *Avengers* and *Justice League of America* during his career. "I never want to be accused of taking a short cut on this book. For better or worse, you're getting my most dedicated art."

What? You're still reading the intro? What are you waiting for? Check out the next seven pages for your first sequential look at *JLA/Avengers*!

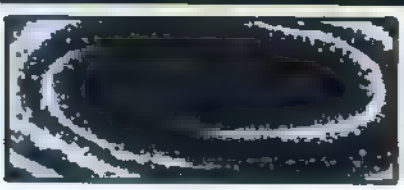
THE WORLD IS POLEMACHUS.
IT IS A WORLD THAT HAS KNOWN MUCH WAR--THAT HAS REVELED IN COMBAT AND BLOODSHED--
BUT TODAY--
TODAY ITS PROUD CAPITAL CITY KNOWS ONLY JOY AND CELEBRATION. FOR TODAY IS A GREAT DAY--
--THE DAY OF THE IMPERION.
GOING SOMEWHERE, MY LOVE?
I THOUGHT I'D GRAB A WINESKIN, SOME MEAT AND CHEESE FROM THE COOKROOM, AND GO KHEF-HUNTING IN THE HILLS TODAY.
YOU'RE WELCOME TO JOIN ME, OF COURSE.
UNLESS YOU'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA?
MMM. MAYBE LATER
BUT TELL ME--WERE YOU PLANNING THIS MANLY JAUNT FOR BEFORE OR AFTER YOUR SUBJECTS HONOR YOUR ASCENSION TO THE IMPERIAL THRONE?
:SIGH< I SUPPOSE IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT TO AVOID IT ENTIRELY. BUT ALL THOSE ENDLESS SPEECHES PUT ME STRAIGHT TO--
MILORD ARKON! LADY THUNDRA! WE ARE ASSAILED!
EH?
VIZIER, WHAT--?
CAN YOU NOT HEAR IT? THE RUMBLES OF FEAR--THE CRIES OF PANICKED POLEMACHANS IN THE AVENUES?
GO TO THY WINDOWS, IMPERION--AND SEE!
BY THE SACRED RINGS--!

IT IS NOT THE SIZE OF THAT WHICH FILLS THE SKY THAT MAKES IT SO UNNERVING.
IT IS THE GAZE--AN INTELLIGENT, QUESTING, HUNGRY GAZE THAT LANCES THROUGH EACH BEING BELOW.
IT FILLS THEIR HEADS, THEIR MINDS--QUESTIONING, DEMANDING--
WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS THE SECRET? WHAT IS THE TRUTH? TELL ME! TELL ME!
≥NNH!≤
≥HKK≤
AND WHEN IT DOES NOT RECEIVE AN ANSWER, IT SEEKS--
--AND IN ITS WAKE COMES DEATH.
NO!
NO!
STAND, CREATURE!
STAND AND FIGHT! ARKON THE
POLEMACHUS DIES.
...AND A UNIVERSE DIES WITH IT.

ANOTHER UNIVERSE. OCCUPYING THE SAME SPACE, BUT A DIFFERENT VIBRATORY PLANE OF REALITY.
THE WORLD IS QWARD.
IT IS A WORLD THAT HAS KNOWN MUCH WAR AS WELL.
IT KNOWS IT TODAY.
HOLD THEM BACK, WEAPONERS! HOLD THEM BACK!
GODS OF CARNAGE, WE COMMAND THE MOST DEVASTATING ARSENAL IN ALL CREATION! SURELY WE CAN DRIVE OFF FIVE MERE--
KRAM
THOM
HAHAHAHA
WHAT A DELIGHT, POWER RING! I HAD NO IDEA THIS PLACE EVEN EXISTED! HOW DID YOU EVER FIND IT?
EHH JUST BORED, ULTRAMAN. SCANNING THE HEAVENS WITH THE RING.
THOUGHT THIS'D MAKE FOR A NICE AFTERNOON.

ATLEAST THESEGUYSCAN PUTUPAFIGHT, EH?
MAYBE WESHOULDLEAVE JUSTENOUGHTOREBUILD, SOWECANCOME BACKAND--
TELL ME.
EH? DID YOU SAY SOMETHING, QUI--
OHHH.
WHAT IS THE SECRET? WHAT IS THE TRUTH?
THEY WERE THE CRIME SYNDICATE. RULERS OF THIS REALITY'S EARTH
:GHH:
BY THE UNHOLY!
GET OUT OF MY HEAD, CREATURE. GET OUT OF MY HEAD-- AND THEN I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT PAIN REALLY IS.
VILLAINS.
CONQUERORS.
MONSTERS.
BUT NOW THEY, AND THE QWARDIANS, THE WORLD THEY STAND ON AND THE UNIVERSE IT FLOATS IN--
-- ARE NO MORE

DC COMICS & MARVEL COMICS PROUDLY PRESENT:



AND WITHIN THAT UNIVERSE
...A YOUNG GALAXY SPINS, A MERE FIVE MILLION LIGHT-YEARS FROM THE EDGE OF EXPANSION.
AND IT IS OBSERVED.
HE IS EN DWI GAST, THE GRANDMASTER
HE IS AN ELDER OF THE UNIVERSE, ONE OF THE OLDEST BEINGS IN THE COSMOS.
HIS POWER INCALCULABLE, HE HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS EONS-LONG LIFE IN SEARCH OF DIVERSION--IN COSMIC GAMES OF CHANCE AND SKILL, AND IN WAGERS ON THE OUTCOME OF THOSE GAMES.
JUST UNDER A BILLION YEARS AGO, HE MADE A BET WITH ONE OF HIS BRETHREN ON THE PREDICTED FINAL AXIAL DECLINATION OF THE OUTERMOST PLANET OF A STAR SYSTEM THAT WOULD FORM NEAR THE HUB OF THIS GALAXY
TODAY, THAT PLANET WILL BE FORMED ENOUGH--FOR THE BET TO BE WON, OR LOST.
ANOTHER TWENTY SECONDS.
ANOTHER TEN SECONDS.
TELL ME!
THE WORDS ARE NOT WORDS. HIS SENSES ARE POWERFUL ENOUGH, HIS MIND KEEN ENOUGH, TO SENSE IT
IT IS A PROBE -- A BROAD-SPECTRUM ENERGY PROBE THAT SPREADS THROUGH THE UNIVERSE, IN A QUEST FOR ANSWERS, FOR INFORMATION,
FOR TRUTH.

NO FURTHER, INTRUDER.
YOUR PROBE THREATENS THE VERY FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE. I WILL NOT PERMIT IT FURTHER ACCESS.
WHO ARE YOU... AND WHAT DO YOU SEEK?
THE PROBE DRAWS BACK A MOMENT--PERPLEXED, PERHAPS, AT THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING EVEN MOMENTARILY DENIED?
IT PAUSES. SHIFTS. AND
WHAT DO I SEEK?
I SEEK THE ULTIMATE TRUTH.
WHO AM I?
I AM KRONA.
AND I WILL NOT BE DENIED.
GETTING PSYCHED? PICK UP JLA/AVENGERS #1 ON SEPT. 3

getting into *Trouble* with...

MARK MILLAR

By Mike Cotton
with additional reporting by Richard Ho

Our favorite off-the-wall Scot shakes up the romance genre with Marvel's sex-charged 'Trouble,' which may–or may not–rewrite Spider-Man's origin

WIZARD: Marvel's billing *Trouble* as the return of the romance comic. It will deal with teen pregnancy, abortion and tons of other hot topic issues. It seems like the exact opposite of the book most fans think you'd write. Why'd you want to do it?

MILLAR: War comics were dead until we did *The Ultimates* #1 and, as [artist] Bryan Hitch pointed out to me, we suddenly found ourselves with a World War II comic at the top of the charts and selling 225,000 copies in the direct market alone. Genres don't die, they just get reinvented. To me, Spider-Man is essentially a weird love story about Peter Parker and Mary Jane and that's been successful for 40 years. It's how you *execute* the story that matters.

Besides, hot babes, hot guys, summer sex for a hormonally-charged audience? It's actually slightly bizarre that nobody's ever tried a book like this *before*.

Sum up *Trouble* in 10 words or less.

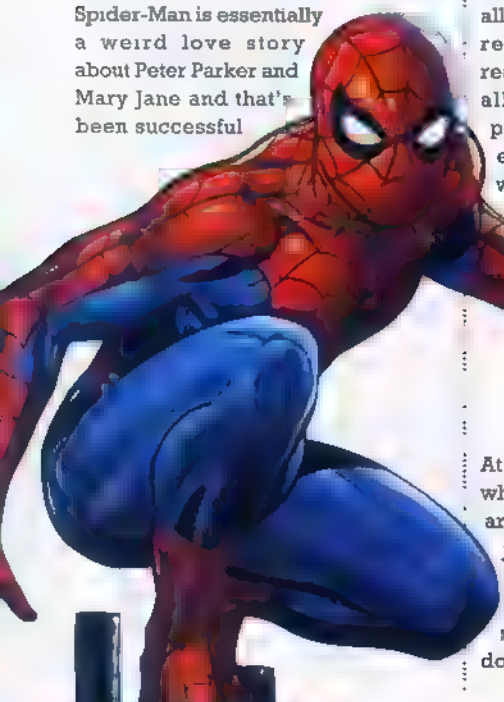
With two testicles comes great responsibility.

So, what's *Trouble* really about?

"Genres don't die, they just get reinvented."

–Millar on the romance genre

Trouble's all about that period in your life when you're desperate to get laid, but nothing's happening yet. Your adult equipment's developed, but you're not getting a chance to use it at all. It's a funny, touching story that's really aimed at male and female readers because it's a period we can all identify with and the big pregnancy plot is something that, even if it hasn't happened to you yet, will probably be happening quite soon. Scared yet, readers?



The two couples in the series are named Ben, May, Mary and Richard. Are they Spider-Man's parents and Uncle Ben and Aunt May?

At this stage, I'm afraid I just can't say whether Ben, May, Richard and Mary are the Ben, May, Richard and Mary *you* might be thinking of. I hate to be a tease, but just watch and see how the story unfolds. I promise it's not what you're expecting. I don't want to ruin Marvel's summer event for anyone.

Do you see this reviving the romance genre?

I'm writing this with the intention of it being a five-issue, stand-alone series, which gets collected into a trade and, fingers crossed, takes its place beside other milestones in comic book history. It's a very important comic and one, I think, people are going to be arguing about for quite a long time.

Have you ever gotten a girl in trouble?

I did get a chick into trouble once, but we'd been married for a few years, so I assumed that would be okay. That said, my father-in-law was a bit pissed off. I think this was confirmation that I was actually having sex with his daughter.

Speaking of kids, what's your next brainchild after *Superman: Red Son* and *Ultimate X-Men*?

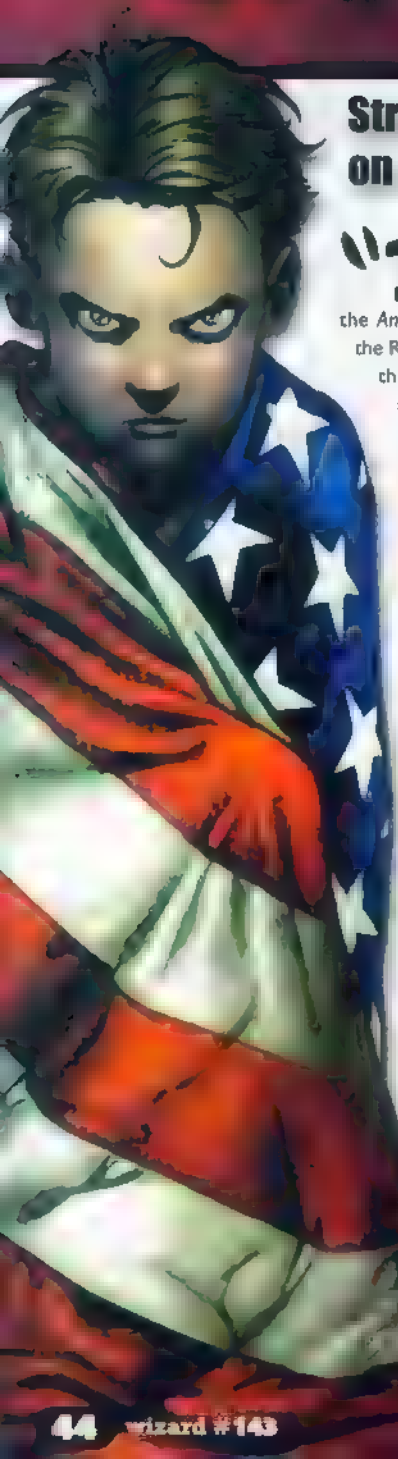
The plan was to follow *Ultimate X-Men* with my big adult creator-owned projects. But [Marvel President] Bill Jemas and [Marvel Editor-in-Chief] Joe Quesada gave me such a great hook for *Trouble* when I was in New York that I pushed this stuff back a little bit because I didn't want to miss out on anything this crazy. I missed pitching [a story idea for last year's best-selling] *Origin* because I was tied up and I was damned if this happened again.

Any trouble with Marvel?

I've actually never had a single fight with Marvel. This is odd because, as you know, I can't keep my mouth shut when I'm annoyed, but I've got a brilliant relationship with those buggers and couldn't even *imagine* getting in trouble with them. Have I ever forgotten to wear a condom and gotten a Marvel Editor into *trouble*? Now that's a different story.

HIDE THE CHILDREN

BY MIKE COTTON



Straczynski and Frank expose their adult-only take on superheroes with Marvel's 'Supreme Power'

"I'm not big on gratuitous sex, language or violence," says J. Michael Straczynski. But that doesn't mean the *Amazing Spider-Man* writer won't live up to the R-rating in Marvel's MAX title *Supreme Power* this summer. "I'm writing this as if it were a series for HBO or Showtime, using that kind of freedom as a point of story liberation but not as a means for gratuitous...well, gratuitous *anything*, really. I don't believe in that kind of arbitrariness. I just wanted to be able to take the kid gloves off and go for it."

Much like his highly acclaimed Top Cow series *Rising Stars*, Straczynski will be given his own universe at Marvel using the publisher's JLA-like Squadron Supreme characters to explore how normal people would react to a legion of superheroes on Earth.

"More than anything else, the first three issues are character studies of who Mark, who grows to become Hyperion, is," says JMS of the Superman-like character. "How he finds himself very much alone as the only one of his kind on the planet with these kinds of abilities. How others react to him, and how others begin to carve out his future for him, in ways he may not necessarily agree with. He's turning into a very interesting character, by becoming brave and smart, but also somewhat tragic."

Series artist Gary Frank will redesign almost all of the Squadron's classic characters including the Wonder Woman-like Princess, the power-ring bearing Doctor Spectrum and the speedster known as The Whizzer, who will not only receive a new costume but also a name change. In fact, Frank ponders another question the series poses: why do superheroes even wear costumes?

"We have a set of preconceptions about these characters and a set of knee-jerk questions," says Frank. "What are their powers? How cool is their costume? We don't very often ask, 'Why are they wearing a costume?' or 'What are they going to do with their powers?'

"With *Supreme Power*, Joe [Straczynski] is taking the concept of the superhero and exploring it as if it were a real person in a real world. If you discovered that you could fly or were bulletproof would you say, 'Great! Now where can I get a cape and some day-glow pantyhose?'"

With a mature-reader tag, Straczynski says he'll use sex, violence and even the occasional four-letter word only when necessary, instead focusing mostly on a realistic portrayal of humans living in a superhuman world. In fact, most of issue #1 will be PG, but that doesn't mean the series won't have its adult moments including full-frontal male nudity, Princess being topless for most of the series, some R-rated bloody battles and a too-hot-for-Cinemax sex scene in issue #2.

"It has its moments of dark humor, which I love, but it's a pretty serious book," says the writer. "The main thing I'm doing is treating it as realistically as I humanly can, asking what would happen in the real world if these sorts of people began showing up, taking it to a level of complexity I didn't have the chance to take it to in *Rising Stars*."

Now, sit back, relax and check out *Wizard*'s exclusive seven-page *Supreme Power* preview which depicts a very different spin on a very familiar origin story.

The ship sings softly of its journey
Oh, I can't take another heartache
Though you say you're my friend
I'm at wit's end.
The ship sings of partings and passings and farewells.
You say your love is bona-fide
But that don't coincide
With the things that you do.
The ship sings into silence, a final chord as fire licks at her skin
And when I ask you to be nice, you say--
You've got to be cruel to be kind
In the right measure
Cruel to be kind
It's a very good sign!
Cruel to be kind, means that I love you... baaaaaabyyy...
The ship whispers You will never be alone.

CONTACT
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CHRIS ELIOPOULOS
LETTERS
MIKE RAICHT
EDITOR
JOE QUESADA
STORY EDITOR AND CHIEF
BILL JEMAS
PRESIDENT
Got to be cruel to be kind.

.ohmygod .

He's not even hurt
It's like . it's like he was sent to us. like God sent him to us
It's a sign that... that things will be okay between us again
He can stay with us, just... just for tonight. We'll look around tomorrow, see if. well, we'll see, won't we?
Until tomorrow Then we'll see

Who's a pretty boy, hmm?
Yeah, hi, hi there, who's a pretty boy, hmmm?
You are. Yes, that's right I'm talking about you
NOK NOK
Who the hell is out at this time of night?
Can you follow my hand? That's it Follow mommy's hand
Up and down, that's right, up and down
Yeah, what's-
Because what goes up must come down

Despite his appearance, his DNA doesn t match anything human. Metallurgical analysis of the ship further confirms a non terrestrial origin
His skin density s phenomenal, it resists nearly everything we tried
And stay clear of his hands... they're small but incredibly strong.
Does anyone else know about this?
Only the couple who found the ship
Will they be a problem?
No. We've explained the consequences in considerable detail
So the ball's in our court, President Carter. We have no idea where this child came from, or if there are any others like him on the way
What we do know is that if there's only one like him, we should take steps to ensure he's on our s de
I agree, Mr Pres dent And you?
It s the law of this country that children orphaned without next of k n are to be considered wards of the state.
I see no reason to make an exception in this case
He's a child of the United States.
See to it he s raised like one
LOOK FOR IT? VOL. 1 SUPREME POWER #1 ON SALE AUGUST 6!

EXPLORING MARZ

CrossGen's top recruiter shares tales of tequila, strippers and...Hal Jordan?

By Brennan McConnell (Mike Conroy)

WIZARD: As CrossGen's resident recruiter, give us your best pitch to join the team down in Tampa.

MARZ: I'm certainly the first one to say that what CrossGen offers isn't for everybody. But I think what it offers turns out to be fairly enticing to a lot of guys who have been in the business for a while, who have seen the ups and downs of the industry and frankly, who are married with kids and have mortgages. Freelancing is great when you're 25 and it's not too bad when you are 30 but when the real world starts to assert itself on your life and you have to deal with those things like school tuition, dental and health benefits, and actually getting a couple of weeks vacation on your job. The stability that someplace like CrossGen offers becomes really a lot more enticing than the sink-or-swim realities of being a freelancer.

Who have you recruited?

[*Path* artist] Bart Sears, [*Way of the Rat* writer] Chuck Dixon, [*Ruse* artist] Butch Guice, [*Crux* artist] Steve Epting, [*Way of the Rat* artist] Jeff Johnson, [*Negation* artist] Paul Pelletier, [*Mystic* artist] Aaron Lopresti, [*Meridian* artist] Steve McNiven, [*Brath* artist] Andrea DiVito

SQUARING TO HELL In addition to his CrossGen books like *Sojourn* (opposite), Marz will occasionally write other stuff like Hellboy (above) for charity.

Whoa. Where do you go looking for new talent?

Nepotism plays a big part of it because you tend to want to work with guys you know and it would be foolish of me to not think of them. It's guys you've worked with and whose work you admire. And we get a fairly large stack of submissions in the mail; we literally pull guys out of the submissions, too.

"This isn't the best environment for someone who wants to sleep until two in the afternoon, eat cereal all day and work in their underwear."

What makes you *not* go after someone to recruit?

There are guys whose work I admire greatly, but I wouldn't even think about suggesting them for a spot here because they're just not the right fit. That doesn't make us a bad place and that doesn't make them bad talent. It's just not a great fit at this time. We found that guys who haven't been in the business that long can tend to be a bad fit. We had some rookies who had no basis for comparison, so their benefits, vacation and paycheck every two weeks didn't really mean a whole lot to them. They were more concerned with, "Can't I go to a matinee anytime I want?" This is treated more like a 9-to-5 job. This isn't the best environment for someone who wants to sleep until two in the afternoon, eat cereal all day and work in their underwear. We do have people work in various states of undress but not down to their underwear, yet.

Besides the perks of the company, what else do you sell to new recruits?

Tequila and strippers, obviously! You know, I don't like to think of myself as a salesman at all because salesmen frankly make my skin crawl. I guess I ended up doing it because I'm friends with a lot of people in the business, and I'm fairly comfortable saying, "This is the way it works. This is the work environment. This is your compensation package. This is your vacation and health benefits," and all the facts that people need to make a decision.

Kind of shifting gears here. Do you miss working for other publishers?

Yeah, you always have that sort of, "Wow, that's a Spider-Man story that I'd like to write." But you know, I've been lucky enough that I've gotten to play with a lot of the really good toys that Marvel, DC and Dark Horse have. To a certain extent I've got it out of my system.

Really?

I wrote superheroes for more than a decade so to be able to come here and do different kinds of stories—fantasy, science fiction or samurai stuff—is really kind of refreshing. It's nice to write something that doesn't have a guy running around in his underwear. But I've got a Spider-Man story coming out at some point. It's a benefit for ACTOR [a charity for retired comic creators]. And I did a *Hellboy Weird Tales* story and donated the money to ACTOR. So, once in a while I'll be able to do something for a good cause. But generally I'm very satisfied playing with the toys I have here right now.

Do you still get crap over turning Hal Jordan into a bad guy?

I don't even know how many years later it is, and people are still pissed off [over Hal Jordan/Green Lantern]. Get over it! I'm still vilified on message boards, but that's okay if you've got nothing better to do. I never caught much face-to-face grief, because I think the anonymity of the Internet leads to a lot of bravery which doesn't otherwise exist. I had one guy pointed out to me at a con as someone who's been crucifying me, and I figured, let's see what this guy's got to say. And he was like, "Well, I didn't really like what you did with Hal Jordan...could you please sign my books?"

WIZARD files a scouting report on the new 'TEEN TITANS' roster, with help from our expert commentator, series writer GEOFF JOHNS!

BY RICHARD HO

TEEN PHENOMS

ORIGINAL ART BY MIKE McKONE, MARLO ALQUIZA & ATOMIC PAINTBRUSH

Geoff Johns knows a thing or two about assembling winning teams. Having crafted championship runs on *Avengers* and *JSA*, DC's ace scribe now turns his team-management expertise to the DCU's new super-squad, Teen Titans, whose first issue debuts July 16.

Johns constructed his lineup with all the skill of a seasoned skipper. First, he signed some of the best young players in the game. Then, he enlisted some cagey veterans to whip the talented but unproven youngsters into shape. Finally, he recruited the steady hands of artist Mike McKone (*Exiles*) to help shape his collection of all-stars into a finely tuned, butt-kickin' machine, capable of taking on and taking out the competition.

"*Teen Titans* is about teen heroes growing up together," explains Johns. "They're saving the world, and each other. I want to have a lot of character-driven stuff, but when the action comes down, it will be brutal. When we do our second arc with Brother Blood, it's going to be JLA-big. They're gonna kick ass!"

Just how good can this team be? *Wizard* breaks out its A-game to predict exactly what each member will bring to the table. We analyze and evaluate the Titans' roster, player by player—and we even go to Johns himself to get his expert take on the stars he drafted.

This is one scouting report the competition would *kill* to get their hands on.

ROBIN

SPECIALTY Keen detective skills, martial arts expertise

SCOUTING REPORT: Tim Drake burst into the big leagues by giving Batman a run for his money when he successfully deduced his secret identity—so you know the kid's got skills. And after honing that analytical noggin and fighting ability under the Dark Knight's watchful eye, Robin is more prepared than ever to bring his game to the next level. He's even taken after the Bat's mysterious ways, confounding teammates by appearing and disappearing from the scene at his whim. With a deadly combo of brains *and* brawn, Robin's considered the team's best fighter and the most likely to keep cool under pressure. While those skills and experience make him the perfect leader—as he was with the former Young Justice team—he prefers to leave that role to older members, like Cyborg. But we gotta wonder if the Teen Wonder will wear the captain's mantle before too long. Whether Robin likes it or not, the rest of the Titans, especially the younger ones, look to him when the going gets tough. Team chemistry is the key to the Titans' success, and it starts at the top.

OUR EXPERT SAYS: "One of the most powerful members of the team—and yet, he's still the guy that everybody underestimates," notes Johns. "Straight-laced and serious. .He's got a lot of tricks up his sleeve .Probably the most well-adjusted member of the team. Doesn't want to be the leader, but everybody looks up to him. . Deep down, he thinks he has a better perspective on the world than Batman . He'll grow into his own type of hero, and it'll be different than Batman, Superman and all the icons that've gone before."

SUPERBOY

SPECIALTY: Tactile telekinesis, super-strength and near invulnerability

SCOUTING REPORT: Every team needs some muscle at the heart of the lineup, and the Titans pack some serious power with the teenage clone of Superman. The Cadmus Labs creation has come to understand and master his powers over the years, rapidly approaching the power levels of his legendary mentor.

One thing that *hasn't* changed is his youthful recklessness and fun-loving personality, all of which routinely lands him in trouble. But don't make the mistake of underestimating Superboy's intelligence—despite his seemingly bone-headed pursuit of good times and girls, he's no dummy. He's savvy enough to see that he'll eventually be forced into the role of Superman's successor, whether he likes it or not. And those are some pretty big tights to fill.

Still, he boasts a healthy belief in his ability to live up to that legacy. And let's face it—he can be cocky routinely challenging Robin's leadership back in their Young Justice days And then there's his strained relationship with Wonder Girl, following the tragic events of Young Justice's final adventure. Only time will tell how these dynamics will play out on the Titans.

OUR EXPERT SAYS. "In many ways, the main character of the book, at least at the beginning," explains Johns "He's a big, strong, corn-fed guy, almost like a high school football player .Arrogance isn't the right word—it's confidence, bordering on arrogance In his opinion, Superman is too straight-laced Believes he'll be forced into the Superman role eventually Gets bored easily, unless you anger him—and then, watch out!...Look for him to evolve, mature and grow up throughout the series."

IMPULSE

SPECIALTY: Super-speed

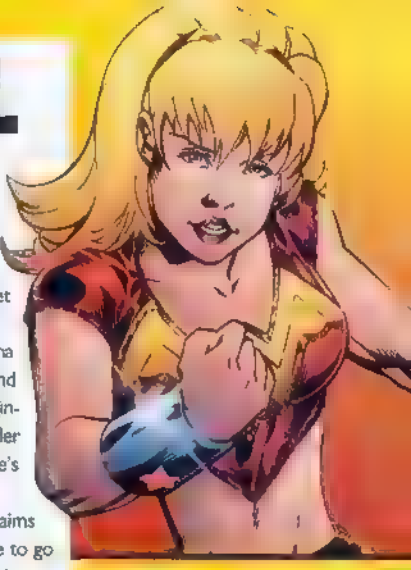
SCOUTING REPORT: Things are about to change for Impulse—in a hurry. The teen speedster stands poised to bust out of his immature shell, and the first few months of his new stint as a member of the Teen Titans promise to be full of surprises.

Bart Allen sped along the fast track to superhero stardom under the tutelage of Max Mercury, the Zen Master of Speed. Once he learned to control his hyperactive metabolism and super-short attention span, the grandson of the Silver Age Flash was able to use his control of the Speed Force in an ongoing battle against evil and boredom.

Ironically, the fastest member of the team has also been the slowest to grow up. With a mile-a-minute mouth and a happy-go-lucky attitude, Bart never seems to take things seriously---and in turn, nobody seems to take *him* seriously Even the current Flash—Bart's uncle, Wally West—doesn't believe that the young speedster is ready to shed his video game mentality and play with the big boys.

OUR EXPERT SAYS: "He's not the quickest speedster in the world—he acts before he thinks, and he has to grow beyond that," relates Johns. "No one really respects him right now ..He's a nice guy, but people don't believe in him as much as he believes in everybody else Cares more than anyone on the team .Big changes are in store over the first four or five months .including some romance."

WONDER GIRL



SPECIALTY: Flight, super-strength

SCOUTING REPORT: She may be the most inexperienced of all her former Young Justice mates, but if there's anybody capable of coming out of nowhere to grab the spotlight with the Titans, it's the tough-as-nails Cassie Sandsmark. With a fearless attitude and superpowers granted by the Olympian god Zeus, Wonder Girl is a younger, spunkier version of the hero she idolizes. And with the Titans, she'll get another chance to start living up to those lofty expectations.

The events leading up to the disbanding of Young Justice—most notably the death of Donna Troy, the original Wonder Girl and Cassie's mentor—left the young heroine scarred and a bit lost. As a result, she's reluctant to embrace the life of a hero again—at least in the beginning. It took a visit from Starfire (against the wishes of Wonder Woman) to get Wonder Girl back into the game. Now, she's got a long road ahead of her—but lucky for her, she's got some familiar faces at her side.

OUR EXPERT SAYS: "A tough girl, and next to Robin, she's the best fighter on the team," proclaims Johns. "She's going to be more of a woman in this series, and less like a girl...She'll have to go through the most to really accept being a Teen Titan…There's going to be an outside force that starts to affect her, and she'll have to either confront it or give in to it."

BEAST BOY
CYBORG
STARFIRE

SCOUTING REPORT: Every good team needs experience. Luckily, the Teen Titans boast a core of cagey vets that will be instrumental in the development of the next generation.

It all starts with **Cyborg**, the cybernetic hero responsible for recruiting the new Titans. With his half-human/half-robot physiology, Victor Stone flashes impressive physical weapons that constantly evolve, along with computer-like intelligence that will come in handy as he oversees the Titans' operations. And according to behind-the-scenes reports, Johns actually *traded* speedster Jesse Quick for Cyborg back when he was recruiting characters for his run on *Flash*!

Hailing from the doomed planet Tamaran, the warrior princess **Starfire** looks after the younger kids and tries to give them some much needed guidance. Since she grew up as a slave to galactic warmongers, Princess Koriand'r possesses a kindness and compassion that makes her the perfect role model. That is, except when she gets torqued on the battlefield; using her impressive strength, flight and energy bursts, Starfire can sometimes go berserk with bloodlust.

Gar Logan is probably closest to the younger Titans in terms of mentality, playing the middleman role that helps create a sense of team unity. But make no mistake—**Beast Boy** is *not* simply the team's resident jokester. He's been through some of the Titans' toughest years, and his experience and ability to morph into any animal will be as invaluable to the new guys as his wisecracks.

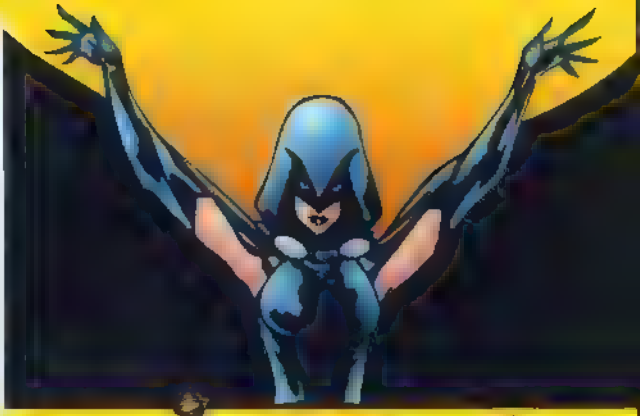
OUR EXPERT SAYS: "Cyborg is the rock of the team…He accepts who he is, and he isn't bitter about his situation," says Johns. "He provides a solid foundation for the rest of the Titans…Starfire was a slave as a kid, and that messes you up big time…So when she's threatened, she blows people away…She's trying to be an older sister to Wonder Girl and the rest of the Titans, and she's the gentlest person you'll ever meet, but when they go into battle, she goes psycho and scares the crap out of them…Beast Boy bridges the gap between the two generations…He's got a great outlook on life, and he has fun doing what he does…And yes, he hits on lots of chicks."

RAVEN

SCOUTING REPORT: The Titans' starting lineup is stocked from top to bottom—but even the best teams need a deep reserve of quality back-ups. New members are sure to join the Titans lineup in the near future—many of them straight out of the franchise's storied past.

First off the bench will be the empathic **Raven**, the half-demon daughter of the evil Trigon. Having worked with previous Titans teams in the past, Raven, who can sense the emotions of others, cause psychic feedback in her opponents and can split her "soul-self" into a separate entity, knows the score and will step right in without missing a beat.

OUR EXPERT SAYS: "Raven will appear towards the end of the first year.. She's different from the other Titans, more of a rebel,' notes Johns. "Also, be on the lookout for other familiar faces, including **Captain Marvel Jr.**, **Hawk** and **Dove**, a shocking 'milestone' DC character...and that's just the beginning!"



DEATHSTROKE BROTHER BLOOD

SCOUTING REPORT Great teams are forged in the heat of battle against their fiercest competition—and given the powerhouses that are scheduled to challenge the Titans' supremacy, we may be looking at one of the most legendary incarnations in the history of the franchise. **Deathstroke**, the super-powered mercenary and the Titans' most bitter rival, will be first on the fight card—expect him to have a lasting impact on at least one Titan for a long time to come. Also, immortal cult-leader **Brother Blood** shows up after that to take a crack at unseating the team. And look for brand new enemies to establish themselves as worthy adversaries as the series marches on.

OUR EXPERT SAYS: "During the first three issues, fans might be a bit disappointed with Deathstroke and what he does, but as time goes by, they'll eventually say, 'Holy sh--! *That's* why he's doing what he's doing!"' says Johns. "Of course, he's got a big gun, and he'll use it a lot, but look for some surprises!"

Scott Mercer Reynolds Holding a rendition of a spider on Teen Titans [illegible] as if drawing [illegible]

THE GLORY DAYS

Think the Yankees have a rich team history? Check out the golden era of DC's teen dynasty, the Teen Titans!

Although the team's humble origins began in 1964's *Brave and the Bold* (vol. 1) #54, it wouldn't be until 1980 when the team would trump practically every title on the racks, including *Uncanny X-Men*. And it is that version of the team that writer Geoff Johns and artist Mike McKone looks to with their new *Teen Titans* series.

"The Titans origins all stemmed from parent/child differences," says acclaimed *Titans* writer Marv Wolfman. "The theme for the Titans began and remained young versus old. These universal concepts, understood by all teens as they grow up and separate from their parents, could be revisited time and time again. I believe they gave Titans a depth of character that had not, up to that time, been often seen in comics."

Resurrected as *The New Teen Titans*, the co-plotting writer-artist duo of Wolfman and George Pérez (the team behind *Crisis on Infinite Earths*) reteamed Robin, Wonder Girl and Kid Flash with newcomers Changeling (now known as Beast Boy), Raven, Cyborg and Starfire. For the first five years of the title, Wolfman and Pérez's stories often dealt with growing up. They focused on the awkward trials of teenage life, including identity issues, runaways, drug abuse, deadbeat dads, sex and relationships.

Perhaps the most memorable issue the team faced was betrayal. As almost a direct response to the X-Men's introduction of cute and perky Kitty Pryde, Titans debuted the tempestuous Terra. Laced with tons of 'tude, she shook the team up with biting sarcasm for over two years worth of issues. Just as Terra charmed her way into fans' hearts, she threw the ultimate curveball by revealing herself a traitor in the infamous arc titled "The Judas Contract" (*Tales of the Teen Titans* #41–#43, *Annual* #3) Working for Deathstroke, her job was to take down the Titans from within–and she nearly succeeded.

With the arrival of the 1990s, the book (then titled *The New Titans*) was cancelled, with subsequent relaunches failing to capture the magic that Wolfman and Pérez made memorable.

"The Titans became a surprise hit," reminisces Wolfman. "I am very proud that I've been able to co-create so many characters that have resonated with so many readers, and I hope George and my Titans will be around for many generations of readers to come." Thanks to Johns and McKone's latest reboot, it appears Wolfman and Pérez's Titans are going nowhere but back on top. ■ **VICTOR TAYBACK**

DOOM'S DAY

THE ULTIMATE DR. DOOM COLLECTOR'S GUIDE

By the Wizard Staff

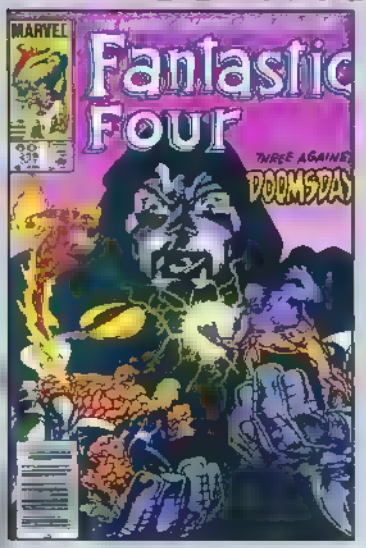
He may only rule Latveria, but let's face it—it's Dr. Doom's world, and we're all just living in it.

From his first appearance in 1962's *Fantastic Four* #5 to the current "Unthinkable" storyline climaxing in July's *FF* #500, the über-genius Victor Von Doom's clashed with virtually every superhero in the Marvel Universe, gaining recognition as both a leader loved by his people and a twisted dictator bent on world domination.

"He's a very broad character," says current *FF* writer Mark Waid. "He has some nobility to him, a real sense of honor, though only when it suits him. I think this sort of regal aspect to this character is what makes him so popular. Also, he's in a sense untouchable as the sovereign of his own country. You can't just put him in jail."

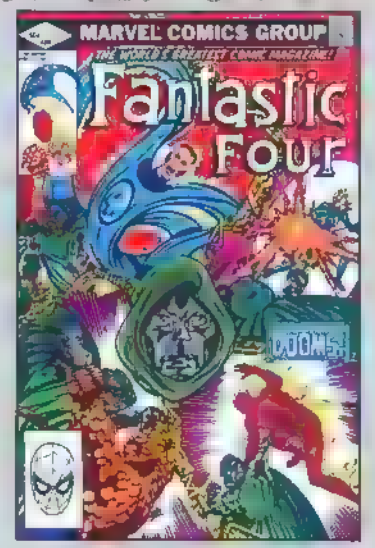
That's what makes Dr. Doom the quintessential comic book villain—he can never be caught or caged. But he can be tracked. To commemorate the landmark #500 issue of *FF*, *Wizard* carefully assembled this Dr. Doom Collector's Guide, running down his Essential Stories, his Greatest Covers, his Most Valuable Issues, plus a bunch of surprises—all including their Near Mint value. But remember—if we missed any of Doom's greatest hits, it's all Richards' fault.

ESSENTIAL DR. DOOM STORIES



5. FANTASTIC FOUR #259–#260

When Doom resurrects Tyros (a.k.a. Terrax) to destroy the Fantastic Four, his obsession with killing Reed Richards results in the mother of all backfires. Tyros attacks the Torch and Thing, and Sue joins in after a Doombot calls her a "kitchen wench." But when Tyros battles the team without Richards present, Doom himself tries to stop Tyros–yet when it's all over, nothing remains but Doom's charred mask. **NM $6 each**



4. FANTASTIC FOUR #246–#247

In the unlikeliest team-up since Punisher and Archie, Doom joins forces with the FF to rid Latveria of the ruthless dictator Zorba by convincing the team that it's their fault Zorba's in power. Doom recruits the FF by demonstrating that Latveria really was better off when he was king. Even after the FF help Doom reclaim Latveria's throne, his most cherished goal–their destruction–remains intact. **NM $6 each**

3. DR. STRANGE/DR. DOOM: TRIUMPH AND TORMENT (HC)

There's only one person who Doom cares for more than himself: his mommy. Doom's sorcery isn't enough to free her soul from Mephisto's clutches, so he schemes to get aid from Dr. Strange. They journey to Hell, where Doom is willing to sacrifice anything–including Strange–to free her. Doom outwits the Devil, but loses what matters most: his mother's love. **NM $18**

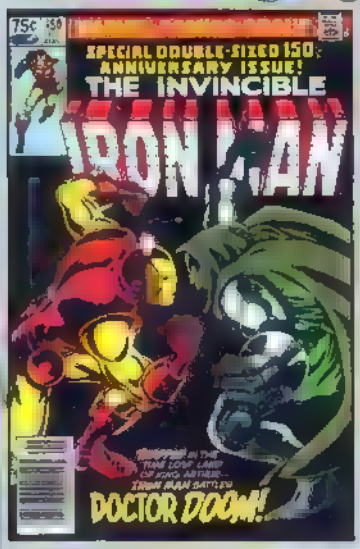
2. IRON MAN #149–#150

When the Time Cube sends Dr. Doom and Iron Man back to medieval Camelot, they find their shining armor en vogue. After Doom's plan to use the sorceress Morgan Le Fey to free his mother's soul from Hell fails, he teams up with Shellhead to build a time machine out of their armors to get home. This tale emphasizes that Doom, always the opportunist, can make even the most dire situation work to his benefit. **NM $4–$5 each**

1. FANTASTIC FOUR #258

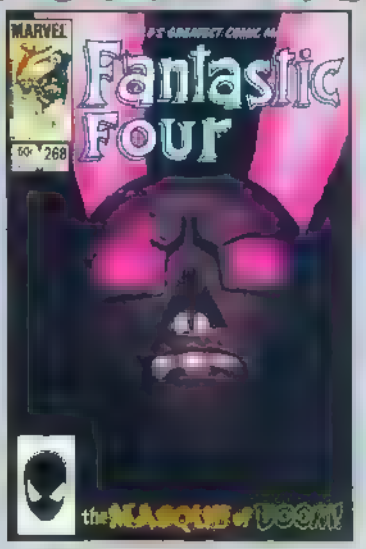
It's "Real World: Latveria" as this single issue presents a day in the life of Victor Von Doom. Writer/artist John Byrne provides a rare peek into the daily commings, goings and killings that go on in Doom's castle. He wastes a Doombot for suggesting he might ever "need" the villain Arcade, kills his scientist Hauptmann with impunity for scheming to kill Doom, and berates his young ward Kristoff for comparing him to Magneto ("No one rivals Doom! NO ONE!"). Regardless of all his egotism and ruthlessness, Kristoff and all of Latveria still love him–no wonder he thinks he should rule the world. **NM $6 ■ TODD CASEY**

BEST DOOM COVERS



5. IRON MAN #150

With apologies to DC's Steel, the two most recognized armored characters in comics–Iron Man and Dr. Doom–clash in King Arthur's era after a time-traveling mishap. No unnecessary details clutter this cover, courtesy of John Romita Jr. and Bob Layton: It's just the two armor-clad warriors squaring off in a fight to prove who's superior! Look for Part 1's cover of this classic story over in the Essential Stories section. **NM $5**

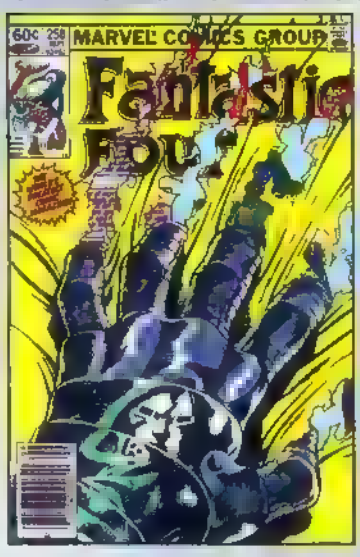


4. FANTASTIC FOUR #268

Photo covers rarely work. But this stunning image of Dr. Doom's mask stops us cold. The faceplate has always been the symbol of his malevolent might and royal power, but rarely has it ever been the actual villain of a story! In this offbeat tale, Doom's automated mask goes on a rampage through the Baxter Building and knocks She-Hulk and the Human Torch for quite a loop, until Reed shows up to save the day (natch!). **NM $6**

3. FANTASTIC FOUR #143

Stylistically, this cover art by Gil Kane and Joe Sinnott may look a bit dated, but compositionally, it completely rocks! You've got all four members of the FF using their powers (including new recruit Medusa, formerly of the Inhumans, who subs for Sue), while Doom multitasks by blasting the Human Torch *and* launching a counter-attack with the device near his right hand! Man, Doom really *is* one bad mutha. **NM $12.50**



2. FANTASTIC FOUR #258

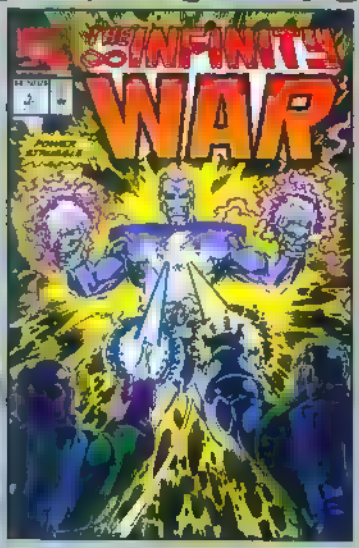
This Doom issue kicks so much ass, we had to include it in this guide twice! *FF* writer/artist John Byrne breaks down the so-called "fourth wall" of comics with this cover featuring a startling image of Doom actually tearing the cover of the comic! Doom's evil visage can clearly be seen in the reflection of his armor, and his power is palpable. And you just *know* Doom's evil if he's willing to rip up comics! **NM $6**

1. SECRET WARS #10

If anything, Marvel readers know one fact: Doom is second to no one. So when readers first saw this amazing cover by Mike Zeck and Terry Austin in 1985, the first question that raced through their minds was: "What the heck could reduce Dr. Doom to such a shambles?" Answer: The Beyonder, an omnipotent being whose power Doom tries to steal and wield for himself. His armor almost destroyed, debris scattered all around his feet, Doom stands completely battered and bludgeoned…yet somehow still defiant, as always. And if there's one man capable of taking on a god, and not only surviving but *succeeding*, it would have to be Victor Von Doom. **NM $2.50**

■ ANDY

DOOM'S MOST BIZARRE APPEARANCES



5. INFINITY WAR #1–#6

Ever see that episode of "The Golden Girls" where Blanche and Sofia bickered and cued the laugh track? Well, the 1992 *Infinity War* mini-series, where Doom and Kang team up to snag the Infinity Gauntlet (while calling each other pompous fools and blithering idiots behind each other's backs), reads exactly like an episode featuring those sassy septuagenarians. Not that we'd know or anything… **NM $3–$4 each**

4. PUNISHER #28–#29

If there's one thing Doom loves more than hearing his own voice, it's fine art. In this *Punisher* arc, Doom bets the Kingpin that he could take out the Punisher in a week. Naturally curious as to why Doom would want to kill him, Frank Castle heads off to Latveria, and just when it looks like it's curtains for the Punisher, Castle takes a rare Faberge Egg hostage, and Doom concedes defeat. Musta been a Doombot. **NM $2.50**

3. TALES OF SUSPENSE #31

When you're Jack Kirby and developing the visuals for the Fantasic Four's ultimate arch-nemesis, where do you go for inspiration? Apparently, the King looked to a master: himself. Mere months before *Fantastic Four* #5 hit newsstands, Kirby had also drawn the cover to this issue of *Tales of Suspense*. Does the "Monster in the Iron Mask" on the cover look a little familiar? Just don't tell Doom that. **NM $250**

2. PETER PORKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-HAM #1

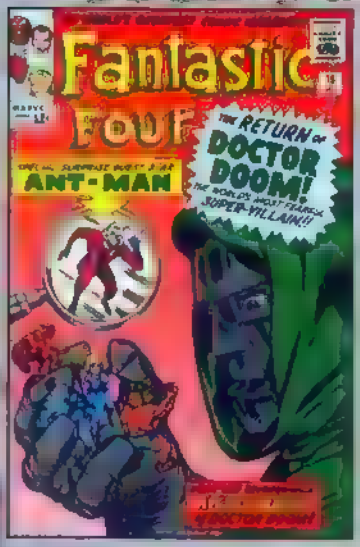
Where to begin? In this kid-friendly series, *Ducktor* Doom tries constructing an *NSYNC-like group in hopes of cornering the market on talentless pop music to appease music-starved kangaroos (yes–kangaroos). Unfortunately, he's foiled by a super-powered pig, a jackal and a buncha rodents. If you think that's bad, wait'll ya see who trumps Doom in the No. 1 slot… **NM $1**

1. MARVEL SUPER-HEROES (VOL. 2) #8

Dr. Doom has faced countless formidable foes, so it really must have hurt his pride when he got his shiny ass handed to him by a mutant named Squirrel Girl. Every bit as annoying as her namesake, Squirrel Girl possesses the ability to squeak and look just as frantic and indecisive when crossing busy highways. Facing certain death on board the Doomship, she manages to call her squirrel friends to attack her captor. There's nothing funnier than seeing Doom, covered in squirrels, yelling, "Confound these wretched rodents! For every one I fling away, a dozen more vex me!" And believe it or not, this 1991 story was written and illustrated by Spider-Man co-creator Steve Ditko! **NM $3**

■ CASEY HERALD

DOOM'S MOST VALUABLE ISSUES



5. FANTASTIC FOUR #16

The FF find themselves shrinking and returning to their normal sizes mysteriously, all the while hearing the ominous voice of Doom, who was thought deceased after shrinking during their last battle. Using shrinking gas in an attempt to locate Doom, the FF discovers that he's conquered the Micro-World! The team's imprisoned, but Ant-Man's on the case. Thank god for that Ant-Man! **NM $350**

4. FANTASTIC FOUR #10

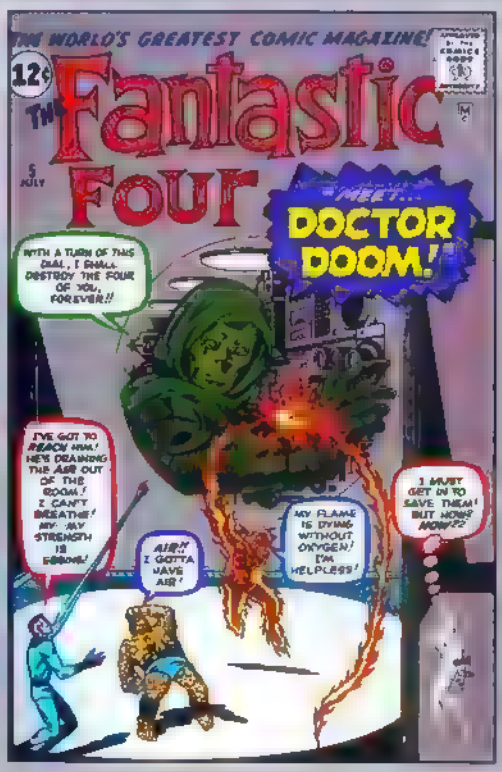
Although *FF* #10 marks Doom's second plot to destroy the team, this issue commands such a high value for another reason: it marks creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's first appearance in a Marvel Universe story! Even though their faces are obscured, they refer to themselves by name throughout the issue. Doom and Mr. Fantastic wind up trading bodies, and (surprise!) the FF mistakenly attacks their leader. **NM $1,050**

3. FANTASTIC FOUR #6

Sorry, unstable molecules. Even though this ish marks your debut, it's Doom's second appearance that pushes *FF* #6 past the two grand mark. Unsatisfied with his failure to crush Richards in #5, Doom seeks out Namor. Actually referring to themselves as the Diabolical Duo, they succeed in cracking the Baxter Building's foundation and elevating it skyward, but Namor winds up saving the day. **NM $2,050**

2. AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #5

After getting his ass handed to him three times by the FF, Doom–in this valuable early *ASM* issue–targets Spider-Man as his ally, which doesn't go over well with Spidey. As Spidey escapes, Flash Thompson prepares a prank for Peter Parker by dressing up as Spider-Man. Unfortunately, Doom (believing Flash to be the real Spidey in a truly laughable scene) kidnaps him, forcing Spidey to come to the rescue. **NM $2,700**


THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
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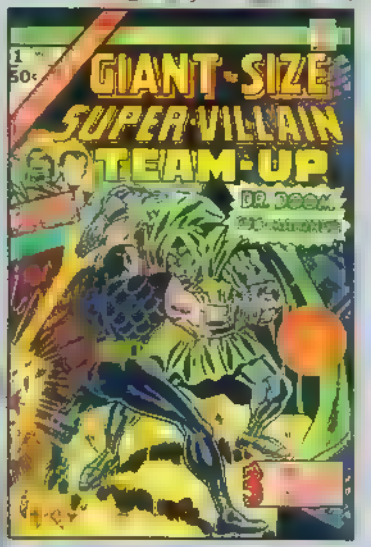
The Fantastic Four
MEET... DOCTOR DOOM!
WITH A TURN OF THIS DIAL, I SHALL DESTROY THE FOUR OF YOU, FOREVER!!
I'VE GOT TO REACH HIM! HE'S DRAINING THE AIR OUT OF THE ROOM! I CAN'T BREATHE! MY STRENGTH IS FAILING!
AIR!! I GOTTA HAVE AIR!
MY FLAME IS DYING WITHOUT OXYGEN! I'M HELPLESS!
I MUST GET IN TO SAVE THEM! BUT HOW? HOW?!

1. FANTASTIC FOUR #5

There's a reason Doom wears green in this issue, as it's no shocker that the armored despot's first appearance seals the deal for biggest money-grabber. Arguably the Marvel Universe's most recognized supervillain, Doom makes a memorable debut by enclosing the Baxter Building in a steel net and capturing the FF (but giving Reed plenty of time to recognize the voice of Victor Von Doom and reveal to the rest of the team his origin). Doom forces Mr Fantastic, the Human Torch and the Thing to travel back in time to obtain the pirate Blackbeard's treasure, but ultimately they find their way back to 1962 and send Doom flying. **NM $4,000** ■ **JESSE THOMPSON**

DR. DOOM BOOKS TO WATCH

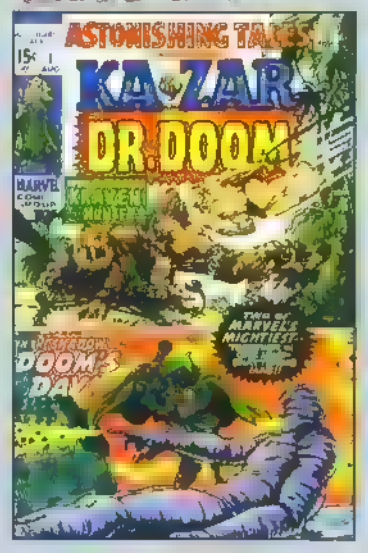


5. GIANT-SIZE SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #1

Bronze Age books keep rising in value, especially NM copies of '70s-era Giant-Size comics. When Namor and Dr. Doom joined forces, readers never knew if they were going to conquer the world or stab each other in the back! Their antics proved popular enough to spin off into this *Super-Villain Team-Up* one-shot, their first co-starring gig (and later an ongoing series). **NM $15**

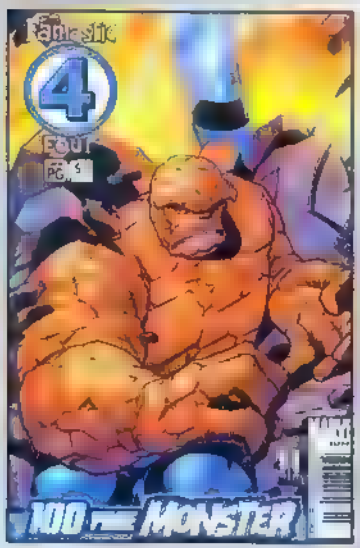
4. FANTASTIC FOUR (VOL. 2) #4

Although many dismiss the Marvel "Heroes Reborn" comics of the mid-'90s as a commercial ploy, this issue stands out because of current *Batman* penciller Jim Lee's awesome rendition of Dr. Doom. The cover speaks to classic Kirby, but with modern attention to detail. And it only gets better inside. Today's hottest artist drawing one of Marvel's most enduring characters–how can this not go up in value? **NM $3.50**



3. ASTONISHING TALES #1

Doom proved to be such a popular bad guy even back in the late '60s, Marvel experimented with his own stories in this comic title he shared with Ka-Zar, the first time a Marvel villain ever had his own ongoing solo stories. In a tale told from Doom's perspective, the monarch is established as one of the most well developed antagonists in Marvel's roster. Even at $40, Doom's first solo gig is a can't-miss investment. **NM $40**



2. FANTASTIC FOUR (VOL. 3) #54

Sue Richards is about to give birth to her second child in this 2002 issue, and the only one with enough expertise to deliver the baby is Dr. Doom! (Is his doctorate in obstetrics?) In a touching moment, all that Doom asks for in return is to have the child named after Valeria–his long-lost love. The baby girl plays a big part in Doom's latest attack on the FF. (Guess he wanted a little something extra in return after all.) **NM $4**

1. MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #20

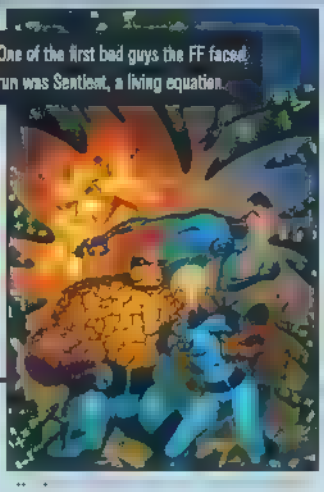
This origin of Dr. Doom from 1969 stands out above all other versions for one reason–it features the first appearance of Valeria, the only woman besides his mother Doom has cared about! Young Victor Von Doom trades a life of happiness with this exotic gypsy girl for the chance to increase his power. Tragically, history repeats itself when Valeria re-enters Doom's life in Mark Waid's current "Unthinkable" storyline. The results are gruesome, to say the least. Even with its hefty price tag, expect Valeria's first appearance to increase once "Unthinkable" culminates in *FF* #500. **NM $25** ■ KARL CRAMER

FOR EVEN MORE DYNAMIC DOOM ISSUES, VISIT WWW.WIZARDUNIVERSE.COM!

BOOK of the MONTH!

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARK WAID STRESSES FAMILY TIES WITH HIS RUN ON THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE



MATHLETES One of the first bad guys the FF faced during Waid's run was Sentient, a living equation.

If Reed Richards were to sum up writer Mark Waid's run on *Fantastic Four*, he'd probably say, "Sanguine fluid is substantially more viscous than pure liquid hydrogen and oxygen."

In other words, blood is thicker than water.

With the help of series penciler Mike Wieringo, Waid has reestablished what Reed and Co. are at their core—a strong family. Never before have the FF been closer, and judging from the latest storyline, "Unthinkable," they're definitely going to need each other's support, as Dr. Doom has gone straight for the family's jugular by sending Franklin Richards to hell and torturing both the Invisible Woman and the Human Torch.

But Waid didn't look to any parenting magazines or attend family counseling sessions to get a sense of Marvel's First Family—the veteran scribe simply looked at the FF's origins.

"I just went back to Stan and Jack, frankly," says Waid in reference to FF creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who established the FF as a family first and foremost during their 102-issue run on the series. "I certainly go other places—I look to friends, I look to relationships I've had in the past, but mostly I just go straight back to Stan and Jack."

Despite the fact that Waid and Wieringo have added "Cosby Show" elements to *FF*, they haven't scaled back on adventure and thrills. In the nine issues that have shipped so far, the team has had to face an infestation of cosmic insects and an outbreak of unstable molecules that nearly engulfed the state of New Jersey. Known for his knack of the scientific, Waid has also introduced Sentient, a villain that can only be described as a living algebra equation hell-bent on impressing the greatest mind in the world, Reed Richards.

But city-trashing math problems and interdimensional vermin aren't the only things causing tremors around the Baxter Building. Waid's also brought back the most dangerous villain in the Marvel U. to the pages of *Fantastic Four*—Dr. Doom. Waid has combined the armored monarch's best elements—an evil genius, a powerful force and a formidable threat with his skills in the black arts—reminding fans why the name "Doom" fits so well.

Waid's quick to point out that he's only gone back to the core of the character. "I keep in mind what Doom wants, and he wants to destroy Reed Richards," says the scribe. "Ultimately, he's jealous of Reed's intelligence, because he can't abide being the second smartest man on Earth. Everything Doom does revolves around the notion of destroying Reed Richards' life."

And as proven by the recent five-part "Unthinkable" (which culminates in July's *FF* #500, a return to Marvel's original series numbering scheme) Doom strikes the Four where it hurts the most: Franklin and Valeria Richards. Using his skills as a sorcerer, Doom has banished Franklin to Hell and used little Val as a mystical weapon. Doom's even managed to drive that accursed Richards to the brink of insanity.

"We're not kidding when we say at least one member of the team's gonna walk away scarred by the experience," hints Waid. "Whatever Doom has done to these characters in the past pales in comparison to the stuff he puts them through in 'Unthinkable.' No one in issue #501 greets the new day with a big smile. There's major fallout and it's really gonna put the family to the test in terms of if they can stay together." ■ CS

FOUR SCORE Artist Mike Wieringo has spiced up the FF (and given the Thing a nice set of chompers.)

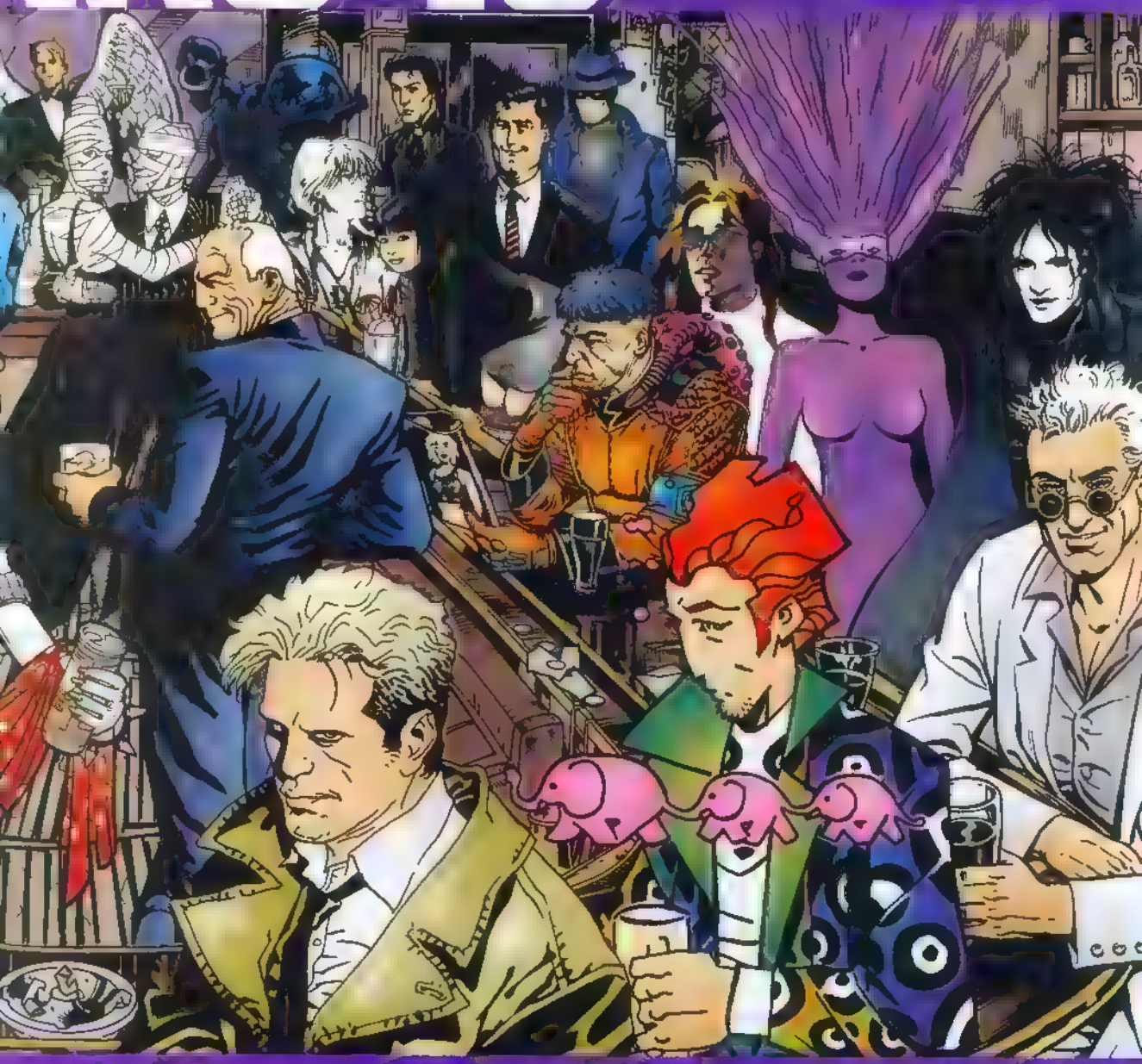
VERTIGO TOP

K

—line at DC, which would promote groundbreaking concepts never before seen in comics; concepes like political satire, literature and superhero deconstruction that would flip the readers' worlds upside down, justifying the moniker of Berger's revolution—Vertigo Comics. ■ "We'd been seeing a growing popularity in books that weren't necessarily geared for the fans of superhero books, but rather readers looking for a unique reading expe-

RNS 10

Meet the 10 creators who ignited a revolution by building DC's house of mystery | BY CASEY SEIJAS



collaborating on a new imprint which would include books I had been working on with creators like Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore, and out of that came Vertigo." ■ Despite the cussin', nudity and a growing desire for mature reader titles, by all rights, Vertigo should have failed. After all, the "experimental" imprint was launched during a golden age of superhero popularity. "Batman Returns" ruled the box office, the speculator market was in full swing and fans couldn't get enough of the caped crusader. Why would readers want high-concept, university-level literature like Gaiman's Sandman or Moore's Swamp Thing over the high-octane slugfests going on in X-Men? But it was that hardcore minority audience, hungry for something different, that fed the fire that would eventually spark the Vertigo revolution. And like any revolution, it was an assortment of fearless trailblazers that helped bring about the change. Read on, as Wizard spotlights the 10 creators who helped build DC's house of mystery—Vertigo Comics.

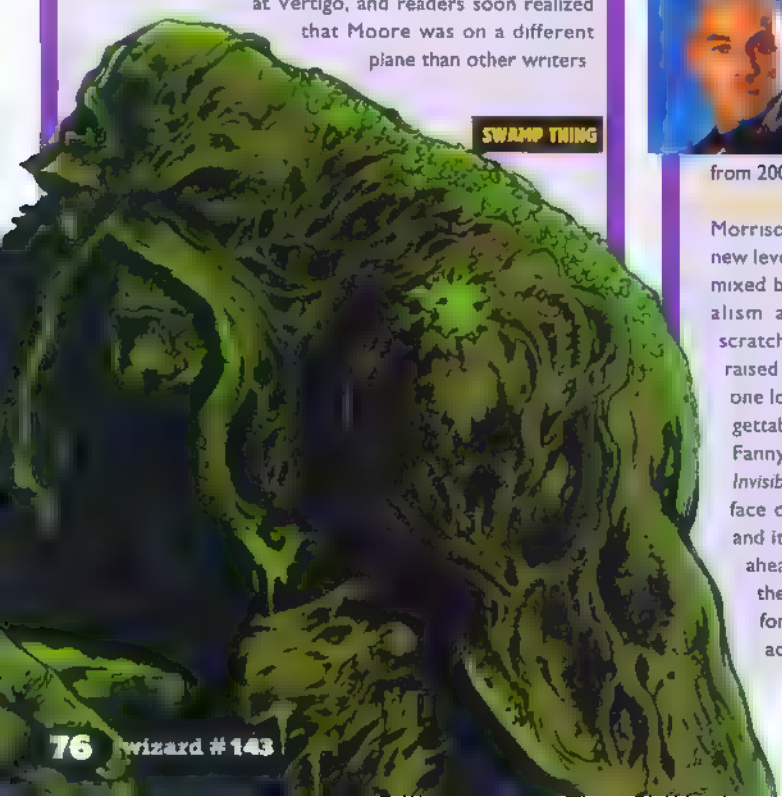
Alan MOORE

Saga of the Swamp Thing/*Swamp Thing* (44-issue run from 1984-1987)

Saying that Alan Moore has been one of the greatest influences on all of comics is like saying the Beatles sorta made an impact on rock music—a dramatic understatement. Moore's stories have always been ahead of their time, case in point, his run on *Swamp Thing*, in which Moore was telling Vertigo-esque stories before the idea of Vertigo even popped into Karen Berger's head. And granted, Moore never actually wrote a comic for Vertigo (although his *Swamp Thing* trades now carry the imprint's logo on them), but it's clear that with the types of stories he was telling, DC had to create a line especially for him. Call Moore the grandfather of the Vertigo line.

"I really enjoyed the job [Brian] Azzarello and Richard Corben did on that particular run [of *Hellblazer*]," says Moore, who created John Constantine during his *Swamp Thing* run. "I don't really have any thoughts on how people handle characters of mine from the past. To compare them is to compare biblical Jesus to Jesus from 'South Park.' I liked that 'Hard Times' run, though. It was good."

It only took his first two issues of *Swamp Thing* before readers soon realized that Moore was telling a different kind of comic story. In *Swamp Thing* #21 (a story titled "The Anatomy Lesson"), Moore revived the long-ignored character of Swamp Thing, and broke him down before building him back up again. Thanks to intricate plots and detailed insights, Moore's deconstruction of the superhero mythos around *Swamp Thing* foreshadowed what was to eventually become the norm at Vertigo, and readers soon realized that Moore was on a different plane than other writers.



SWAMP THING

Dave McKEAN

VERTIGO ESSENTIALS: *Sandman* (75-issue run from 1989-1995), *The Dreaming* (60-issue run from 1996-2001), *Sandman: Book of Dreams* (1996), *Vertigo Visions* (2000)

HIS LEGACY: Not only did the Vertigo line introduce high-end literature to the comics world, it also introduced fine art, thanks to the mixed-media works of artist Dave McKean. McKean took a very unique approach to comic art—he threw out pencils and inks and used everything else, whether it was painting, model-building, photography, digital manipulation, typography or any number of combinations. Looking at McKean's work, it's clearly worthy of a gallery showing at the Louvre. By doing this type of revolutionary art, McKean established a Vertigo "house style" that's still being felt throughout the line today.

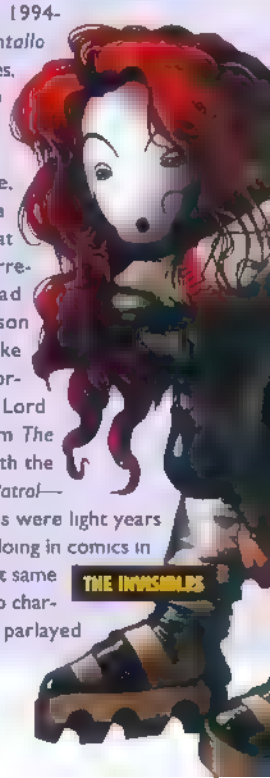
QUOTABLE: "[Neil Gaiman and I] recently wrote a screenplay together," recalls McKean. "It was the first time we have ever actually sat in a room for several days together and worked out a project face to face. It turns out that after working together for 15 years, we are completely incompatible. We glowered at each other over our dinner. It worked eventually, but that was a surprise."

LANDMARK WORK: Take a look through McKean's covers for *The Dreaming* and you'll get a lesson in fine art that most

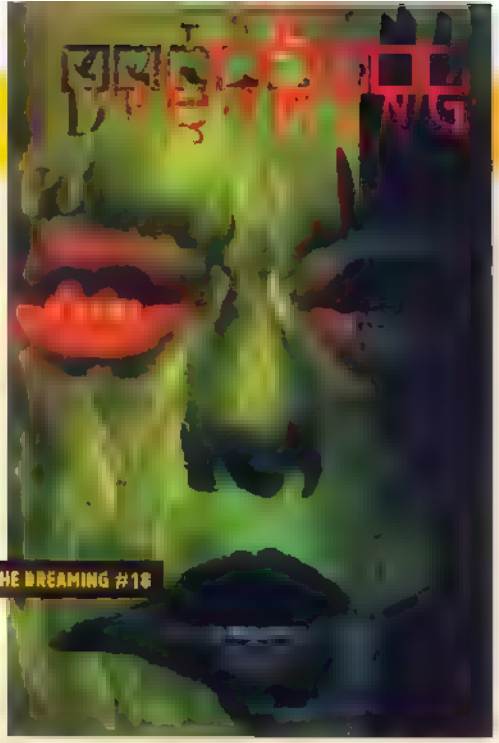
Grant MORRISON

Doom Patrol (45-issue run from 1989-1992), *The Invisibles* (59-issue run from 1994-2000), *Flex Mentallo* (four-issue mini-series, 1996), *The Filth* (12-issue maxi-series from 2002-2003)

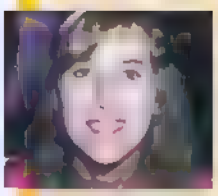
The rock star of the line, Morrison took the Vertigo style to a new level of creativity. With stories that mixed bizarre humor, Dada-esque surrealism and a healthy dose of head scratching who-knows-what, Morrison raised the bar for other writers. Take one look at some of Morrison's unforgettable character creations—from Lord Fanny, a transvestite magician from *The Invisibles*, to Dorothy, a little girl with the face of a chimpanzee from *Doom Patrol*—and it's clear that Morrison's stories were light years ahead of what everyone else was doing in comics in the early-to-mid-'90s. And it's that same forward-thinking and over-the-top characterization that Morrison has parlayed



THE INVISIBLES



colleges couldn't even begin to teach, but it was the cover to issue #18 that really showcased McKean's skills. Beautiful and disturbing, McKean ushered in a new form of cover work with this issue that brought digital photo manipulation to a whole new level of style that has yet to be matched.



VERTIGO ESSENTIALS: Pick 'em; she's had a hand in every single Vertigo project ever published!

HER LEGACY: Without Berger, there would be no Vertigo line—simple as that. But Berger has done so much more than simply create the first and finest mature readers line; she's served as the editor on some of its standout titles, such as *Sandman* and *Swamp Thing*. Moreover, she helped introduce audiences to previously unheralded creative talent, including Neil Gaiman and Grant Morrison, who hadn't yet achieved the superstar status they currently enjoy

QUOTABLE: "I'd have to say the thing I'm most proud of being a part of Vertigo this long has been the quality of books and the talent that has contributed to the line," says Berger. "If you look at what's currently popular in mainstream comics, you can trace it back to Vertigo, and I'm not only talking about creators, but concepts. We've managed to inject literature into comics, and for that, I'm very proud."

LANDMARK WORK: Despite having a hand in nearly every Vertigo title ever published, it's clear that, much like Vertigo wouldn't exist without Berger, Berger wouldn't be in her current position without *Sandman*, which propelled the imprint into the collective comics consciousness.

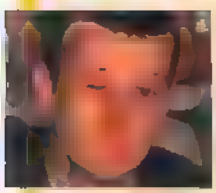
into successful superhero stints on *JLA* and *New X-Men*

"If there hadn't been Vertigo, I wouldn't have written *Flex Mentallo*," admits Morrison. "If it hadn't been for *Flex Mentallo*, I wouldn't have written *JLA*. If it hadn't been for *JLA*, I wouldn't have written *New X-Men*, so...yeah, things would have been different."

Morrison's Vertigo résumé serves as the fine line between genius and madness, and nowhere else was this more apparent than his initial run on *Doom Patrol*. In his first storyarc, collected in the *Doom Patrol: Crawling from the Wreckage* trade paperback, Morrison managed to combine the political rhetoric that he displayed in his run on *Animal Man* with the offbeat quirkiness of *The Invisibles*. Likewise, Morrison's portrayal of a broken superteam of rejects who are enlisted to save the world shows Morrison's knack for strange characterization

Above: Brad Marlet, McKean and Berger; Al Ortega, Morrison; Paul Schrader.

Garth Ennis



VERTIGO ESSENTIALS: *Preacher* (66-issue run from 1995-2000), *Hellblazer* (various runs from 1991-1999)

HIS LEGACY: Before Garth Ennis came along, topics like suicide, cancer, rape and disfigurement were not only social ills, but untouchable subjects in comics. However, with his work on *Hellblazer* and *Preacher*, Ennis managed to tackle those taboos by simply poking fun at them through characters like *Hellblazer*'s John Constantine and the twisted cast of freaks in *Preacher*, including Arseface (with a mug not even a mother could love) and super-criminal-turned-comic-relief Herr Starr. Yet despite solid runs on *Hellblazer*, Ennis is best known for *Preacher*, a series that made him a comics superstar. By mixing Christianity, redemption, a love story and over-the-top violence in one epic series, Ennis managed to offer readers a taste of intelligent social commentary disguised as an installment of "Texas Chainsaw Massacre." Looking at his accomplishments, it's no wonder why *Preacher* became the first Vertigo title to consistently rank high on Diamond's Top 100 list.

QUOTABLE: "I suppose [Arseface] grew out of a worrying tendency that a lot of impressionable young people have to follow their heroes into suicide, which is the crappiest, most unimaginative thing I think you can possibly do," notes Ennis of the memorable *Preacher* character. "If it's because daddy won't give you the keys to the car that night, and life is just so unfair and some miserable bloody singer who hasn't discovered soap is telling you that suicide is a good idea—then to be honest, I'm not terribly impressed."

LANDMARK WORK: Despite the fact that the last issue of *Preacher* capped off the series in grand fashion, it was *Preacher* #24 that proved to the comics world that Ennis and artist Steve Dillon were legit superstars. The final chapter of the epic "Crusaders" storyarc found the Saint of Killers taking on the vast extremist armies of The Grail, the wicked Herr Starr setting off a nuclear bomb on U.S. soil that destroys everything within a five-mile radius and the inbred son of Jesus Christ meeting a gruesome end—by way of a disgustingly obese man falling on him.

Ennis, Alonso, Phillips/Risso

Axel Alonso

Unknown Soldier, Human Target, Preacher, 100 Bullets, Jonny Double, Gangland, Heart Throbs, Weird War Tales

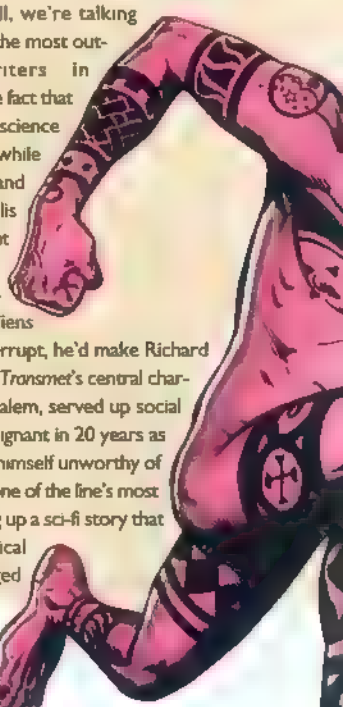
Vertigo has always been known as an imprint for mature readers, but before Alonso came along, it was also known mainly as the place where fans of fantasy and mystical based stories could get their monthly fix. Alonso, who openly admits he's not a fan of fantasy-based comics ("I could give a sh-- about the unicorn books, and I know nothing about magic, so I couldn't do that," he says), single-handedly re-invented the line to include gritty crime thrillers like *100 Bullets* and *Jonny Double*, over-the-top series like *Preacher* (Alonso took over with issue #11) and also re-introduced harsh war comics to the industry with *Unknown Soldier* and *Weird War Tales*. By offering comic fans new genres of storytelling that were long underdeveloped in comics, Alonso paved the way for cool and edgy comic series that have helped the imprint evolve into the source for crime stories and tales taken straight from the front pages of newspapers.

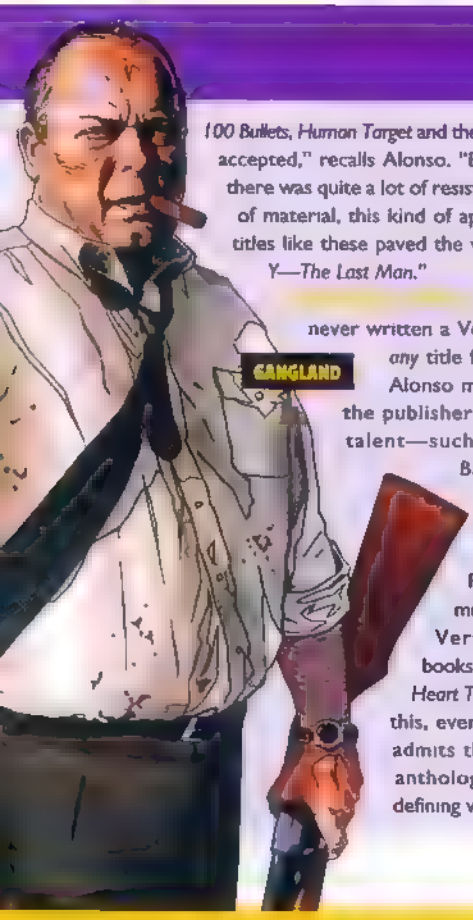
"I had to swim upstream to get books like

Warren Ellis

VERTIGO ESSENTIALS: *Hellblazer* (10-issue run, 1999), *Transmetropolitan* (60-issue run, from 1997-2002)

HIS LEGACY: Say what you want about Ellis—after all, we're talking about one of the most outspoken writers in comics—but there's no denying the fact that he single-handedly revolutionized science fiction with *Transmetropolitan*, all while injecting a biting sense of humor and satire to boot. With *Transmet*, Ellis managed to do the impossible—paint a realistic view of the future, and it's a future that's absolutely terrifying, filled with drugs, half-breed aliens and a president so ruthless and corrupt, he'd make Richard Nixon look like a saint! Meanwhile, *Transmet*'s central character, angry journalist Spider Jerusalem, served up social commentary that will be just as poignant in 20 years as it is now. Even though Ellis deems himself unworthy of inclusion on this list, by introducing one of the line's most recognizable characters and serving up a sci-fi story that manages to infuse insightful political commentary without getting bogged



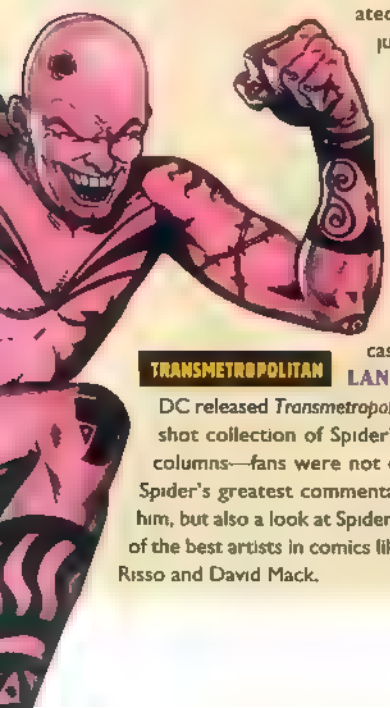


100 Bullets, *Human Target* and the anthology books accepted," recalls Alonso. "Believe it or not, there was quite a lot of resistance to this kind of material, this kind of approach, and yet titles like these paved the way for stuff like *Y—The Last Man*."

Despite having never written a Vertigo comic (or *any* title for that matter), Alonso made his mark at the publisher by discovering talent—such as the *100 Bullets* creative team of Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso—and premiering them in the Vertigo anthology books like *Gangland* and *Heart Throbs*. Because of this, even Alonso openly admits that the Vertigo anthology titles are his defining works.

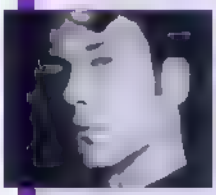
down in it, Ellis broke new ground in storytelling that is still being felt today.

QUOTABLE: "I think it's probably better than the present day," explains Ellis of the Kafka-esque future world he created in *Transmetropolitan*. "It just doesn't seem that bad to me. There are an awful lot of problems that have been licked in *Transmet*. disease, obviously. Lifestyle choices, in general. In these instances, I think living in The City is a lot better than what we're living with right now. And in a lot of cases, it's the same."



LANDMARK WORK: When DC released *Transmetropolitan: I Hate it Here*—a one-shot collection of Spider's most memorable news columns—fans were not only treated to a bevy of Spider's greatest commentaries on The City around him, but also a look at Spider through the eyes of some of the best artists in comics like John Cassaday, Eduardo Risso and David Mack.

Peter MILLIGAN



Human Target (four-issue mini-series, 1999), *Shade: The Changing Man* (70-issue run, 1990-1997), *Human Target: Final Cut* (2003)

If there was one problem with the types of stories Peter Milligan brought to the Vertigo table, it's that they oftentimes were too innovative. Take *Shade: The Changing Man*, a new take on the Steve Ditko creation about an alien sent to Earth to combat a madness unleashed by his alien race. Shade's only weapon was his Madness Vest, which somehow collects the insanity, only he never completed his training so he's constantly screwing up. Or try Milligan's riff on the '70s classic character, the Human Target, which proved to be a crime thriller on par with a Quentin Tarantino film festival. *Target* followed Christopher Chance, a bodyguard who paid the rent by disguising himself as a potential assassination target, but every time he'd become the target, he'd lose a bit of his own personality and transform into that person—black, white, male or female! But no matter how bizarre a Milligan story became, it always seemed to have enough realistic elements to make you stop and think, "Yeah, I could see that happening."

"I think Vertigo has managed most of the time to be both recognizable and coherent, while retaining its eclecticism," says Milligan. "It means a lot to me, and is probably one of the main reasons I've kept returning to comics. It's also important not to underestimate the quality of the individuals who've worked and continue to work for Vertigo."

You can't miss with *Human Target* #1-#4. Milligan manages to successfully update the classic character, while keeping all the cool aspects about him from the past. And it's the supporting cast that makes this series a must read. Whether it's Christopher Chance's schizophrenic protégé Tom McFadden, militant preacher Earl James or drug-dealing gangsta Dee Noyz, it's clear Milligan spent plenty of time creating a cast that most American crime writers could only wish they would have thought of first.

RISING STARS

Take a look at the next wave of Vertigo talent, driving the imprint into the next decade

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

Despite a solid run on *Swamp Thing* from 2000-2001, Vaughan secured his place in the spotlight with his critically acclaimed run on *Y–The Last Man*. More than his excellent characterization and spot-on dialogue, Vaughan has created a fan-frenzy with his utterly realistic–and terrifying–look at a world where men were extinct. *Y* proves that you don't need monsters to make a good horror thriller–one-breasted feminists work much better!

BILL WILLINGHAM

After spending the better part of a decade below the radar for the publisher working on titles like *Sandman Presents...* and creator-owned projects like *Proposition Player*, Willingham now bask in the success of his fairy tales-meets-the-real-world series, *Fables*. Proving that your name doesn't have to be Morrison or Milligan to write truly twisted tales, Willingham manages to crank the bizarre up to 11, all while keeping readers enthralled with each page-turning storyarc.

EDUARDO RISSO

Picking up where his groundbreaking predecessors left off, Risso's pencils for *100 Bullets* are nothing short of breathtaking. With stylized art that looks as if it's just come out of the seedy underworld that he nails with each issue, Risso is quickly establishing himself as a go-to penciler for not only Vertigo, but the DCU as well, now that it's been announced he'll be picking up where Jim Lee leaves off on *Batman*.

WILL DENNIS

Like Axel Alonso did in the '90s, Dennis continues the tradition of developing gritty storyarcs and series for Vertigo that are inspired by the front pages of newspapers around the world. And much like his predecessor, Dennis takes a hands-on approach when working with creators–whether it's up-and-comers like Vaughan or comic legends like Joe Kubert, who collaborates with Brian Azzarello for *Sgt. Rock: Between Hell and a Hard Place*. With a résumé that includes *100 Bullets*, *Hellblazer* and *Y–The Last Man*, it's clear Dennis has made his mark at the publisher–and he's only been there for three years!

ANDY DIGGLE

Diggle, who honed his skills on the British comic *2000 AD*, has established himself as a writer with a talent for scripting black ops and military-style titles, as proven in his current Vertigo series, *The Losers*. More than that, Diggle writes one amazing action sequence, which could possibly set off a new genre for the publisher, which up until now, seemed to shy away from straightforward, high-octane adventure stories.

BRIAN AZZARELLO

VERTIGO ESSENTIALS: *Hellblazer* (29-issue run from 2000-2002), *El Diablo* (four-issue mini-series, 2001), *100 Bullets* (2001-current))

HIS LEGACY: Every family has a black sheep, and Azzarello's got no problem playing that role for the Vertigo family. For starters, the two-time *Wizard* "Best Writer" award winner isn't known for writing Vertigo stories drenched in mysticism or metaphysics. As a matter of fact, during his controversial run on *Hellblazer* (controversial in the sense that he was the first American to ever write the uber-Brit magician, causing quite a ruckus among hardcore *Hellblazer* fans), Azzarello played up John Constantine's sleight-of-hand and con man skills rather than his mastery in the black arts. Azzarello's stories aren't necessarily bizarre, like Morrison's, or even humorously over-the-top, like Ennis'. Sure, he's written a ghost story set in the Old West, but *El Diablo* was nothing short of a badass revenge tale. So how did Azzarello make the cut? By inventing an entirely new genre for the Vertigo line—American street fiction. With his current run on *100 Bullets*, the writer has taken readers to places they'd never thought they go in comics—seedy bars, inner-city projects, penthouses bought with dirty money and maximum security prisons. His dialogue reads like you're listening to an underground single from Eminem or a radio broadcast of a crime noir serial—in other words, the man is a wordsmith! Meanwhile, much like his version of Constantine, Azzarello's ever-so-subtly been crafting what's sure to be considered one of the most ingenious and groundbreaking comic series of all time with *100 Bullets*—and it's not even halfway finished! Don't believe us? Why not ask the colleges and universities currently requiring their students to read the series as part of a collegiate English curriculum!

QUOTABLE: "Aw man, people hated it," explains Azzarello about his run on *Hellblazer*. "[*Hellblazer* editor] Will [Dennis] said he'd never seen so much hate mail! I caught a lot of sh-- because of John Constantine, but what can I say, the guy was fun to write."

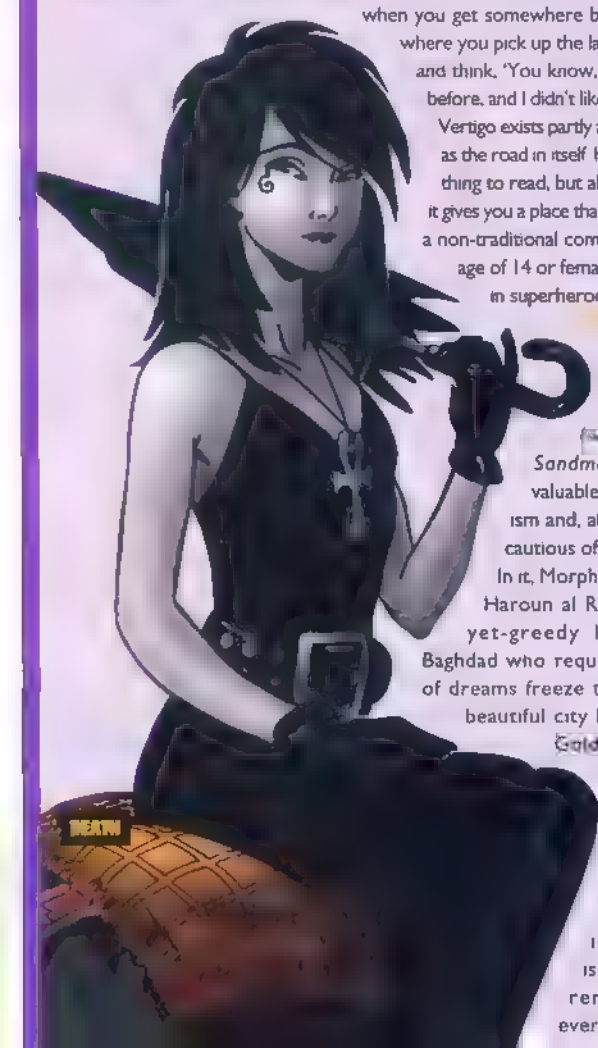
LANDMARK WORK: *100 Bullets* has introduced some of the most unique—and totally believable—characters to ever grace the comics page, but it was Milo Garret's first appearance in *100 Bullets* #31, which also kicks off the aptly named five-part storyarc, "The Counterfifth Detective," that takes the cake. Garret (who won *Wizard*'s "Best New Character" award in 2002) can only be described as a cross between DC's Unknown Soldier and every good 1940s movie detective ever created. And while "Counterfifth" didn't necessarily serve as a major turning point, nor were any major revelations brought to light, it showed that Azzarello was a master storyteller. We're not gonna tell you what happens in the end, but suffice to say that absolutely no character—no matter how much you like him— is safe in *100 Bullets*.

Neil GAIMAN

Sandman (75-issue run from 1989-1995), *Books of Magic* (four-issue mini-series, 1990-1991), *Death: The High Cost of Living* (three-issue mini-series, 1993), *Death: The Time of your Life* (three-issue mini-series, 1996)

Regarded as the imprint's first official superstar, Neil Gaiman has become synonymous with Vertigo. Not only did Gaiman introduce the line's first recognizable characters—namely Vertigo's original anti-hero Morpheus and his brothers and sisters of The Dreaming—but Gaiman's unique storytelling, which fused little-known comic characters with high-concept literature, spawned what would become the line's unwritten style guide for the early '90s. With his historic run on *Sandman*, Gaiman not only attracted comic book fans and casual readers alike, but national media celebrities like singer/songwriter Tori Amos and comedian/activist Janeane Garafolo to his work. And despite taking an extended hiatus from the line to work on his series of award-winning novels and poetry/prose collections, Gaiman has proved that he's got staying power, as his *Sandman* collections still fly off of the shelves of both comic shops and major bookstores like Barnes & Noble alike.

"It's amazing, when you sit and actually start listing the comics that have been published by Vertigo, you've got an enormous number, and they cover an enormous number of genres," proclaims Gaiman. "There's a huge problem sometimes when you get somewhere between 16 and 17, where you pick up the latest superhero title and think, 'You know, I've read this story before, and I didn't like it then.' I think that Vertigo exists partly as a bridge and partly as the road in itself. It can give you something to read, but also, by its sensibility, it gives you a place that you can go if you're a non-traditional comics reader over the age of 14 or female or not interested in superheroes."



Gaiman's modern-day fairy tale "Ramadan" (which appeared in *Sandman* #50) taught a valuable lesson in materialism and, above all else, being cautious of what you wish for. In it, Morpheus confronts King Haroun al Raschid, the naive-yet-greedy king of ancient Baghdad who requests that the king of dreams freeze time and have his beautiful city live forever in its Golden Age. However, Morpheus tricks the king and simply bottles the city in its current state, and transforms it into an impoverished land that has remained that way ever since.

THE SPINS

Wanna know what's coming up from Vertigo?

As Vertigo continues to celebrate one of its most successful years in comics—backed by breakout series like *Y—The Last Man* and *Fables*—fans want to know what's in store from Vertigo. Here's a rundown of what you can expect to see in the coming months.

OTHERWORLD

In March 2004, writer/artist Phil Jimenez offers up the scope of "Lord of the Rings" and the imagery of "The Matrix" combined with a dose of "Survivor"-like reality in this 12-issue maxi-series which follows a group of college kids embroiled in an all-out, interdimensional war.

SUPERMAN: IT'S A BIRD

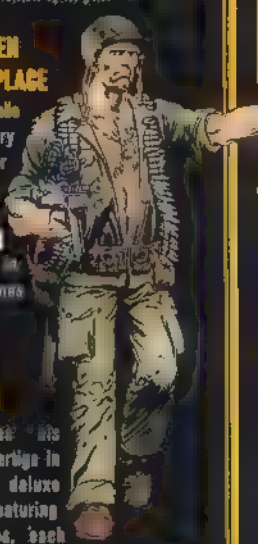
Big Blue makes his Vertigo debut in February 2004 in a 128-page graphic novel written by *Superman* writer Steven Seagle with art by Teddy Kristiansen. *It's a Bird* takes on the symbolic meaning and inner turmoil of the Man of Steel seen through the eyes of a writer hired to work on a Superman movie script.

HUMAN TARGET

Peter Milligan's critically acclaimed mini-series goes monthly in August. Teaming once again with Javier Pulido, the *Human Target* ongoing follows Christopher Chance as he tries to start a new life as a film producer. However, he soon learns that no matter how far you run, the past has a tendency to catch up to you.

SGT. ROCK: BETWEEN HELL AND A HARD PLACE

In November, Brian Azzarello teams with legendary penciller Joe Kubert for this 144-page graphic novel that finds DC's greatest soldier [right] leading Easy Company in one of its most dangerous missions ever.



THE SANDMAN: ENDLESS NIGHTS

Neil Gaiman makes his triumphant return to Vertigo in September with this deluxe hardcover collection featuring seven all-new stories, each starring different members of the Endless, and illustrated by a slew of top talent including Frank Quitely, Glenn Fabry and Bill Sienkiewicz.

VERTIGO VERTICAL

Steven Seagle (*Superman*) and Mike Allred (*X-Statix*) collaborate for a revolutionary take on comics in December. Half the width of a normal comic and read from top to bottom, *Vertical* follows two young fame seekers—one who jumps off buildings in search of God, the other simply looking for purpose in life—who cross paths at the infamous Warhol Factory, a meeting that changes both their lives forever.

The Top Comic Book Movies of All Time

...and some so bad, you've just got to see them

By the Wizard Staff

Think earning an Oscar nomination is tough? Try pleasing the ever-fickle fanboy.

While there's been a plethora of comic book movies to emerge in the past five years (starting with 1998's "Blade" and leading up to the just-released "Hulk"), it takes a special kind of comic flick to connect with both mainstream audiences and continuity-privy comic aficionados. Instead of picking out just the gems that have etched themselves into the consciousness of Joe Moviegoer, we took it upon ourselves to highlight and rank 50 comic book movies—warts and all—starting with the 49-cent, rent-one-get-one-free duds and working our way up to the triple-DVD-worthy greatest comic book movies of all time.

To determine our rankings, a concrete set of criteria was needed. First, we limited our list to movies that were theatrical releases (or at least intended as such) and were based on characters that appeared in comics first—that meant no "Star Wars," "The Shadow" or Kevin Smith flicks would be included. (However, we made one exception to this rule—films based on novelist Robert E. Howard's Conan universe made the cut since Conan is recognized by so many comic fans due to his long-running Marvel series.) Second, the movies had to be based on comic books, and not comic strips—that meant no "The Phantom," "Dennis the Menace" or "Annie" (thank God). Third, we left out films based on kiddie comics—that meant no "Josie and the Pussycats," "Casper" or "Richie Rich."

Obviously, the comic movies that had an established history of sucking ("Batman & Robin," anyone?) would lend themselves to the bottom of the list, but how to rank headliners such as the "Superman," "X-Men" and "Spider-Man" flicks? Was it based on box office success? Direct ties to their comic book counterparts? Mainstream appeal? How well they stood the test of time? Ultimately, we just asked ourselves, "How much ass do these films kick?"

So whether you agree or disagree, sit back, toss your "Daredevil" soundtrack into the CD player, and check out the top (and bottom) 50 comic book movies of all time!

The Top Comic

SUPERMAN, BIGGEST WORLD, THE CRYPT AND THE MASK: EVERETT COLLECTION; X-MEN 2: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX; BLADE: © NEW LINE CINEMA; BATMAN: WARNER BROS.

BATMAN & ROBIN

(1997 Warner Bros.) Ugh. Now that that's out of the way, listing all the reasons why every copy of this film should be collected and rocketed into deep space would be way too easy, so we're gonna take the high road and list all the reasons why "Batman & Robin" deserves to be among the greatest comic movies of all time. For starters, there's... uh, okay, the acting was, hmmm, no, the fight scenes, uh... damn it. Listen, when you've got your lead actor (in this installment, George Clooney) openly proclaiming, "I destroyed the franchise," then you know you just made a horrible movie. And we're talkin' to you, Joel Schumacher!

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STEEL

(1997 Warner Bros.) NBA superstar Shaquille O'Neal hates crime like he hates being fouled in the paint. But just because the Los Angeles Lakers' center looks like a superhero on the courts doesn't mean he's cut out for the spandex set—just check out "Steel." With an all-star (*chuckle*) cast including Judd Nelson and Richard Roundtree, "Steel" finds Shaq playing former J.S. weapons designer John Henry Irons, who developed technology that can harmlessly neutralize soldiers. (Like that's any fun.) Betrayed by the government, Shaq moves to L.A. to work in his uncle's junkyard where he designs battle armor—sans the trademark Superman "S"—and begins taking out the local gangs. Unfortunately, much like the Clippers, the gangs don't win.

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RED SONJA

(1985 MGM) Hell hath no fury like a mullet scorned. Making her big-screen debut, a pre-"Rocky IV" Brigitte Nielsen stars as the flame-haired warrior (with serious hockey hair) from Robert E. Howard's Conan universe who also boasted her own Marvel series. While Arnold Schwarzenegger gets top billing in "Sonja," it's not as the "Crom!"-spouting barbarian we all know and love but rather a generic swordsman named Kalidor. Nielsen doesn't fare much better—she's forced to utter dialogue like "I don't need any man's help!" while repeatedly getting rescued by Arnie. And where the hell are the cool sword battles? And special effects? And gratuitous cleavage shots? Stick with the comics, kids.

VIRUS

(1999 MCA/Universal) Jamie Lee Curtis ain't no Sigourney Weaver, and this Dark Horse property ain't no "Aliens." Curtis plays a member of a drifting ship crew who boards a deserted Russian vessel—er, vessel. They should've taken their chances at sea, aboard are filthy (albeit technologically inclined) aliens who view the human race as a "virus" to be exterminated. Seriously, how do we know they're wrong? Maybe we're the herpes of the cosmos. Anyway, if you've never seen a creature-on-the-loose-in-an-enclosed-space flick before, enjoy. We especially like Donald Sutherland chewing so much scenery that he probably crapped Kodak after a day's work.

FANTASTIC FOUR

(1994 New Horizons) This ill-fated hackwork was a hasty attempt by Roger Corman to maintain the near-expiring film rights to Marvel's First Family. With the freedom of not having to worry about pleasing a theatrical audience—or any audience at all—the resulting unreleased excrement stinks on every possible level. After the initial thrill of seeing Dr. Doom and a not-half-bad Thing in live-action foam, viewers are bombarded with Ritalin candidate Jay Underwood as Johnny Storm, and a climax that features his triumphant "Flame On!" routine reduced to a literal cartoon. Flame on? Yes, right on the negative, please.

SUPERMAN IV: THE QUEST FOR PEACE

(1987 Warner Bros.) Blood from a rock, friends. After two blockbusters and one camp classic, producers threatened Chris Reeve's dog until he agreed to appear in (and co-write!) this travesty. With a precocious little runt egging him on, Superman agrees to disarm the world's powers of their nuclear weapons. All's well and good until Lex Luthor (a welcome Gene Hackman) creates the blow-dried Nuclear Man. Supes and the radioactive villain engage in cosmic warfare, with Nuke even escaping into space with damsel Mariel Hemingway. Uh, how does she breathe? Anyway, we know is that's the least of this flick's problems. We won't even mention Jon Cryer as Lex's twerpy nephew. (D'oh—too late.)

CONAN THE DESTROYER

(1984 Universal) Arnold Schwarzenegger returns to the role that made him famous—and the results are much less than satisfying. A campier, tongue-in-cheek feel has replaced the first film's dark, violent tone, as Conan leads a ragtag group of warriors (whose ranks include pop diva Grace Jones and former L.A. Laker Wilt "The Stilt" Chamberlain) to safeguard a virgin princess from an evil sorcerer. There's a cool fight scene involving Conan and Chamberlain's Bombaata near the end of the flick, and Jones shines as the Nubian warrior called Zula. But the not-so-special effects, weak plot and even weaker cast make us wish Conan would destroy his co-stars.

CAPTAIN AMERICA

(1991 Columbia Tri-Star Video) What job do you think it was to craft the rubber ears Matt Salinger (offspring of novelist J.D. "I have no son" Salinger) sports in this atrocious direct-to-video flick? Who came up with this idea in a production meeting? Did it meet with generous nods of approval, or was there one lone intellectual giant who grumbled to himself? Whatever the case, the sight of a rubber-eared Cap instantly transfers this cheese-fest into so-bad-it's-still-unwatchable territory. In an effort to halt the scheme of a now-Italian Red Skull (guh?), Cap springs into action and actually says, "Gee whiz." Whiskers, this movie sucks!

TANK GIRL

(1995 MGM UA) Based on Jamie Hewlett's cult U.K. comic, the best thing about "Tank Girl" is that it won't kill you. Okay, there are a couple of redeeming qua-

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rties. Lori Petty (Tank Girl) provides plenty of attitude to spare, and Naomi Watts (who plays Jet Girl and would go on to "The Ring") adds some much needed sex appeal. However, the story (a megalomaniac controls all the water in a post-apocalyptic landscape and it's up to Tank Girl and Jet Girl to stop him) is nothing original, while the kan-

garoo-human hybrids (led by none other than Ice-T) are so crappy-looking, they're laughable even by B-movie standards. Read the book instead, or just watch Watts (on mute).

SUPERGIRL (2004, MTV) A hot chick in spandex goes a long way, but "Supergirl" needs a few dozen more. Helen "Sister of Christian" Slater stars as Kara Zor-El, who travels to Earth to befriend rabbits and wince at Faye Dunaway's hammy performance as the villainous Selena. The film quickly extinguishes any hope that the Man of Steel will show up, as a radio report explains that Superman's conveniently on a peace-keeping mission a few galaxies away. (However, a poster featuring Christopher Reeve hangs prominently in one scene.) Jimmy Olsen and Lucy Lane turn up, while the all-powerful Omegahedron device (the one thing that can save Supergirl's home) lands in a bowl of cheese dip. How appropriate.

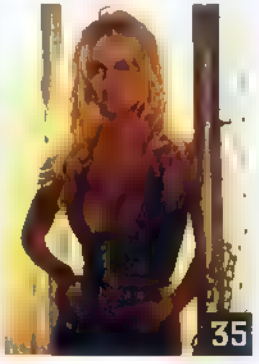
THE CROW 2: CITY OF ANGELS (1996, Miramax) Nicolas Cage and Meg Ryan star in a love story that—oh wait. Wrong flick. This sequel to "The Crow" has nothing to do with the 1994 hit (original star Brandon Lee died tragically during the filming of the first flick), and it shows. Vincent Perez (a heavily accented French actor) stars as the undead vigilante as the second installment of James O'Barr's underground series follows Ashe Corven, a man killed along with his son after witnessing a murder. Ashe gets a second chance for revenge and tracks down the man behind the murder, a psycho named Judah. "City of Angels" gives new meaning to the phrase "slow as molasses," but look for an appearance by upcoming "Punisher" star Thomas Jane.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE SECRET OF THE OOZE (1991, New Line) You know you're in trouble when Corey Feldman won't even reprise his role. However, for the rush-released sequel to 1990's "TMNT" blockbuster, producers proceeded with such offbeat casting as an unseen Kevin Nash as the Super Shredder and Vanilla Ice as himself. (Best scene: Vanilla apparently ad-libbing the shoulda-been classic "Ninja Rap" while the Turtles battle a giant mutant wolf and snapping turtle.) Not as much fun as the original flick, the sequel relies too much on repeat gags (They like pizza! Splinter makes another funny!) and a thin plot, even by Turtle standards (it's a movie about ooze). At least gifted thespian Ernie Reyes Jr. pops up as Keno, the Turtles' sassy new ally.

THE CROW 3: SALVATION (2000, Miramax) Following suit with the first "Crow" sequel, "Crow 3" once again tells a story that has nothing to do with the original film. It's slightly better this time around as clean-cut Alex Corvis (played by Eric Mabius, who would later pop up in "Resident Evil") takes on the role of the undead soldier of vengeance after being wrongfully executed for the murder of his girlfriend. Corvis gets a second shot at redemption and, as these Crow guys are wont to do, avenges the true killers. What makes this "Crow" rank higher on the list? Try a pre-"Spider-Man" (and still very hot) Kirsten Dunst making her first appearance in a comic movie.

SUPERMAN III (1983, Warner Bros.) Richard Pryor, sometime after lighting himself on fire in a drug-induced haze, makes an even bigger mistake as a computer wiz under the watchful eye of Robert Vaughn. When Supes sticks his moral nose into their business, Vaughn unleashes synthetic Kryptonite laced with tobacco. The result instantly transforms this insultingly campy flick into B-movie gold, with Superman turning into a sleazy degenerate. He grows a five o'clock shadow, hangs out in a bar, and best of all, tries to seduce Annette O'Toole while dozens of innocent people await certain death clamoring for Superman. We like it, but we ain't proud of it.

BATMAN FOREVER (1995, Warner Bros.) No Tim Burton and no Michael Keaton—right off the "bat," "Batman Forever" had two strikes against it. Yet despite the Technicolor look of this film (as opposed to the darker, how-a-Batman-movie's-supposed-to-look feel of the first two films), "Forever" does have its merits. First off, Jim Carrey's take on the Riddler had fans rolling and Val Kilmer actually does a decent job as the Dark Knight Detective, but Chris O'Donnell gave us a whole new reason to hate Robin, and Tommy Lee Jones gave new meaning to the term "overacting" with his over-the-top performance as Two-Face. At least Nicole Kidman's cleavage can keep you entertained for the entire two hours.



BARB WIRE (1996, Gramercy) Before contracting cooties, Pamela Anderson still had a stranglehold on the teenage boys of America. At first glance, pairing her

CREATOR'S CHOICE

Comic industry pros pontificate on their favorites, least favorites and the comic films they can't stop watching...even when they want to.

FAVES

"I love the original 'X-Men' movie. It was a perfect way to do superheroes in a real world setting. That movie really blended the real world with the X-Men universe and set up a great franchise."

—*Soulfire* creator Michael Turner

"The original 'Superman' film is a great movie. Beyond being a comic book film, it's a classic American movie. It's just iconic. It's Superman and apple pie."

—*Teen Titans* writer Geoff Johns

LEAST FAVE

"I'm gonna have to go with 'Captain America,' because if I ever find out I'm gonna die, I just want that movie playing in the background because every hour's gonna feel like a year."

—*Fantastic Four* writer Mark Waid

GUILTY PLEASURE

"I really dig 'The Crow.' I'll watch that movie anytime I find it on cable. I'm a closet Goth—sue me!"

—*Green Arrow* writer Judd Winick

"I love watching for my hands in the 'Spider-Man' film. I usually turn it on right before you see my hands and then turn it off right afterwards. I like the movie, but I still get a thrill out of seeing my hands."

—*New X-Men* penciler Phil Jimenez

[NOTE: Jimenez's hands were used for the scenes of Peter Parker sketching out his costume.]

"I don't think anyone considers 'Blade' a bad movie by any means, but I consider it a guilty pleasure in that 'Whoda thunk that would be a good movie? because it's a crappy old character. But I think David Goyer wrote a terrific screenplay, and anytime that's on, I'll check [it] out."

—*Y—The Last Man* writer Brian K. Vaughan

— THE WIZARD STAFF

assets up with a leather-clad comic character must have sounded like a license to print money. Too bad the plot has her in the midst of some political intrigue, which is kind of like dropping Gary Coleman into the UFC. Anderson runs around in heels, fires guns and generally does everything expected from the star of a camp project trying to out-do the Adam West-era "Batman." At least Clint Howard appears for a bit, making us all feel better about our chances with Pam.

JUDGE DREDD (1995, Hollywood) The verdict is in. Playing a futuristic cop who acts as judge, jury and executioner to the people of Mega-City One, Sylvester Stallone utters phrases such as "I am da law!" Unfortunately, there was no law to stop fans from seeing this celluloid disaster. Add in a good strong dose of Rob "I'm cheap comic relief" Schneider as sidekick Herman Ferguson and it's a wonder there weren't any cases of mass suicide at theaters. Based on the hardcore, extremely violent, British-published *2000 A.D.* character "Judge Dredd" does deliver on one level—it makes fans wish "Stop Or My Mom Will Shoot" was on instead. At least hottie actress Diane Lane turns up as fellow judge Hershey.

RETURN OF SWAMP THING (1989, Columbia) A documentary on mulch would provide more thrills. Granted, this flick may have "guilty pleasure" written all over it, but its merits can't be ignored. After all, it managed to spawn *two* television series—a live-action series on USA (starring stuntman in rubber suit Dick Durock, who played Swamp Thing in both films) and a cartoon, which for some reason didn't take with the kids. However we'd sit through this flick just to catch Heather Locklear as love interest Abby Arcane (daughter of nemesis Anton Arcane). "Is there a Mrs. Swamp Thing?" she asks the walking salad bar. "No," he replies, "I'm a bachelor." Is anyone shocked that this grossed just over $180,000 during its theatrical run?

BULLETPROOF MONK (2003, MGM) If you were an eternally youngish Tibetan monk with no name on the run from Nazis, who would you train as your successor? Hmm…why not Stifler from "American Pie"? Although Seann William Scott gets a laugh or two as trainee Kar, this film (based on the 1999 Image mini-series) is mostly hilarious for Chow Yun Fat's heady philosophical statements, spoken in a thick accent. But when translated for Kar, they come out as, "Why do hot dogs come in packages of eight, and hot dog rolls come in packages of 10?" Unfortunately, forced attempts at humor don't mix well with fight scenes (one of which features the token Nazi superman) that reek of "Matrix" Lite.

MEN IN BLACK II (2002, Sony) An interstellar disaster of epic proportions threatens the Earth—which is exactly how we would've billed "Men in Black II." Once again, Tommy Lee Jones teams up with Will Smith (someone please tell him he's not funny anymore) as Agents Kay and Jay as they attempt to thwart an alien invasion led by a shape-shifter who takes on the appearance of Lara Flynn Boyle. Despite the lackluster special effects and comedy that wouldn't even make a 1st grader laugh, there are some shining moments in the second installment, namely Lara Flynn Boyle flashing some mighty impressive cleavage. And that ta-king pug dog's back. Talking pug dogs are funny.

SPAWN (1997, New Line) With a storyline that sticks to early issues of creator Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* series, "Spawn" finds government assassin Al Simmons (played by the guy who played Mike Tyson in that HBO movie) buying the farm, going to Hell and making a deal with Malebolgia (voiced by Frank Welker, a.k.a. Darkseid on the "Super Powers" cartoon) to become the leader of the army of Hell just so he'll be able to see his wife one last time. While the special effects in the film are impressive and Martin Sheen turns in a menacing (if somewhat hammy) performance as the ruthless Jason Wynn, "Spawn" misses the bullseye due to a PG-13 rating that tones down most of the violence.

THE PUNISHER (1989, New World) This movie succeeds spectacularly, if by "Punisher" the producers infer that's their role in relation to the audience, and if by "Dolph Lundgren" they mean, "Hey, we tried our best." Actually, the monosyllabic chunk of granite isn't so bad here, since that's basically Frank Castle in a nutshell. But apart from Dolph bothering to dye his hair jet black, this resembles hundreds of other straight-to-video time-killers. Castle does get off one good line, though, in response to the accusation he's killed hundreds of people in a few years' time, he deadpans, "It's a work in progress." Unfortunately, so is this movie.

HOWARD THE DUCK (1986, Universal) With seven different midgets you'd expect a blockbuster, right? Nope. Instead, you get "Howard the Duck," which used seven different little people to play the pint-sized alien beamed to Earth. While cigar-smoking, hard-drinking, alien invasion-halting ducks are right up the *Wizard* alley, Howard was a little too Daffy and not enough Donald for our taste. But the film debut of Steve Gerber's creation wasn't all bad—just check out a very frizzy-haired Lea Thompson (sooooooooo hot) who rocks out in the film and even gets a little bestiality-jones going on with Howard in a bedroom scene that made most 8-year-olds cry in their mommy's lap. Ducks are such d--ks.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III (1993, New Line) By the time the third installment of the "TMNT" movie franchise hit theaters, the Turtles' popularity had pretty much gone the way of the Rubix Cube. However diehard Turtles fans still shelled out cash to see the four pizza-scarfin' mutant amphibians travel back in time to feudal Japan to take on a gaggle of samurai and other assorted baddies. Plus, the surprise return of Elias Koteas as Casey Jones is a welcome treat, even if he doesn't beat people up with sporting goods. If only the kid-friendly "TMNT III" took on a slightly darker tone (like in the comics), it would've made more of an impact.

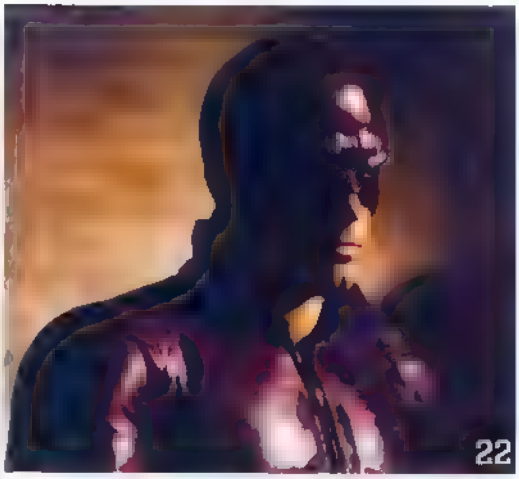
MYSTERY MEN (1999, Universal) When a horrible supervillain known as Cassanova Frankenstein is released from a mental institution and captures Champion City's greatest superhero, Captain Amazing, it's up to a ragtag and reluctant group of heroes to save the day. By playing it completely deadpan, "Mystery Men" (based on the team that appeared in *Flaming Carrot*) serves as one of the funniest comic movies since the 1960s "Batman." After all, when you've got characters like Ben Stiller's Mr. Furious (who assumes he gets stronger the madder he gets), Paul Ruben's The Spleen (with the power of ungodly flatulence) and William H.

Macy's The Shoveler ("I shovel well!"), how can you not laugh?

25 BATMAN RETURNS (1992 Warner Bros.) With an all-star cast, more villains and Michelle Pfeiffer in black latex, "Batman Returns" serves as a stylish—if bizarre—sequel to the first blockbuster. In this installment, the Penguin (played to raw fish-munching perfection by Danny DeVito) teams up with a corrupt, loopy businessman (Christopher Walken) to take control of Gotham City. Meanwhile, Catwoman (Pfeiffer) has her own agenda that Batman has to figure out, all while trying to take down the Penguin. Director Tim Burton manages to make this film as dark and foreboding as the original, but c'mon, Tim—killer penguins that fire rockets? No wonder Schumacher put this franchise in the crapper.

24 SWAMP THING (1982 Embassy Pictures) Oh, what we'd give for this flick to flash "Screenplay by Alan Moore." Instead, we have writer/director Wes Craven's campy tale of uber-scientist Alec Holland's quest to produce a super-plant that can survive any temperature. Unfortunately, rival scientist Dr. Anton Arcane steals it, trashes the lab and murders Holland. But Holland's formula transforms him into Swamp Thing, who seeks revenge in a badly designed green rubber suit, and, like the audience, ogles a babelicious government agent (Adrienne Barbeau). Yeah, it's hokey...but you can't beat this DVD equation: 1 extra scene of bare-breasted Barbeau + 1 PG rating erroneously left on the box = $100 on eBay.

23 BATMAN (1966 Fox) Long before comic movies like "The Mask" and "Tank Girl" came along that mixed superhero action with comedy, Adam West and Burt Ward had audiences rolling with their Technicolor take on DC's Dark Knight Detective and the Boy Wonder. With a bevy of classic lines (such as when Batman and Robin attempt to solve a Riddler clue with this exchange: "Someone in Russia's going to slip on a banana peel and break their neck!" "Precisely, Robin!") and hilarious fight scenes (in which Frank Gorshin magically turns into a Hispanic and Batman slugs it out with a rubber shark), "Batman" serves as more than a guilty pleasure, but one of the funniest comedies of all time!



22 DAREDEVIL (2002 Fox) The devil got his due in 2003. Ben Affleck made for both a convincing blind man as lawyer Matt Murdock (well, save for that playground martial arts sequence) and the anguished Daredevil. Jennifer Garner left fanboys drooling as Elektra, but the film's biggest breakout star was Colin Farrell as Bullseye, the sadistic, sharp-eyed assassin. Overcoming a silly costume, the Irish actor's performance left us running in fear from paper clips! Writer/director Mark Steven Johnson ("Simon Birch"), an admitted Daredevil fanatic, actually used much of Frank Miller's classic *Daredevil* run as storyboards for the film and name-dropped a handful of comic pros, including Joe Quesada, Brian Michael Bendis and David Mack.

21 TIMECOP (1994 MCA/Universal) Jean-Claude Van Damme is at his most coherent here, as a time-traveling police officer who uncovers a scheme by slimy bastard Ron Silver to steal the presidency with historical hijinks. "Judst trust meah," Van Damme intones to wife Mia Sara. And who wouldn't? This is easily the Brussels meathead's best picture, and one of the best features based on a Dark Horse property. The action sequences come fast and furious, the script (by comic alum Mark Verheiden) is sharp, and hey, you sort of want to root for Van Damme to save his hottie wife. Just fast-forward through the gratuitous butt shot.

20 CONAN THE BARBARIAN (1982 MGM/UA) By Crom, thus was the role Arnold Schwarzenegger was born to play! Although slow-moving at times, "Conan" serves up plenty of what readers loved from the comic: blood, guts, babes and Conan flexing his muscles in obscenely creative ways. James Earl Jones shines as Thulsa Doom, an evil cult leader who slays Conan's entire village and later turns into a giant snake! As Conan, Arnie's the perfect choice, and when he delivers his first line of dialogue—almost an hour into the picture!—it's immediately imbedded into your memory: "To crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and to hear the lamentation of their woman."

19 THE MASK (1994 New Line) New Line Cinema forked over big bucks for the special effects-heavy action comedy based on the 1991 Dark Horse mini, but when you've got Jim Carrey as your star—a virtual walking special effect in his own right—there really is no need for big-budget CGI. Add in Cameron "Damn-she's hot!" Diaz making her big screen debut, and it's clear this is one comic movie that stands the test of time. After all, a hero who gets to act like a jackass and still manage to get the super-hot girl at the end is always something the *Wizard* staff can admire—and only dream to accomplish one day.

SCREEN SAVERS

Not every great comic film needs be a direct adaptation of derring-do. There are plenty of other films that have referenced actual comics or used them as set dressing. Among the keenest:

CRIMSON TIDE (1995) In this drama of the high seas, poop deck captain Denzel Washington intervenes in an argument between two sailors over who drew a better Silver Surfer—Jack Kirby or French artist Moebius. (D says Kirby.)

ADVENTURES IN BABYSITTING (1987) Elizabeth Shue has to cart around a bunch of obnoxious brats. Precocious little Mara is so obsessed with Thor that she sports the hat and wields a plastic hammer. Later, some mechanic dude who looks kind of like Thor bums her out by being a d—k.

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN (2002) Who needs escapism when you have Christopher Walken as your dad? In this retro true story, Leo DiCaprio has fun conning women out of their pants and banks out of their money. In homage to the *Flash* comics he reads, he gives himself the alias Barry Allen.

BREATHLESS (1983) It may be another sexually-charged Richard Gere thriller, but amongst the dreck lies Gere's redeeming character trait: He loves the Silver Surfer. Bad career move, Rich, but thanks for giving Norrin Radd a little screen time.

THE TOY (1982) In this terrible waste of film and money, Richard Pryor is hired by Jackie Gleason as a playmate for his son. While Pryor frolics in Spider-Man pajamas, he tries to remain oblivious to the racially disturbing undertones.

RESERVOIR DOGS (1992) Gruff actor Lawrence Tierney probably could've gotten away with portraying the Thing in a cheap high school production or something. The next best thing is to point out the resemblance in this heist flick. Dirty rat Tim Roth also sports a Silver Surfer poster, continuing Hollywood's obsession with Chrome Dome.

THE ICE STORM (1997) In order to escape the morbidity of his oppressive '70s home life, young Tobey Maguire (hey, wait!) seeks solace in copies of *Fantastic Four*. In a monotone voiceover, he explains how their powers simply mean they have more ability to hurt one another. Really uplifting stuff.

COMIC BOOK VILLAINS (2002) In *Starman* scribe James Robinson's directorial debut, two woeful comic shop owners debate having sex with Black Canary (fishnets and all), but the film turns inexplicably serious at the end. We like our shop owners to be gruff but lovable, not homicidal! ■ **JAKE ROSSEN**

BLADE II (2002, New Line) For the second installment in the "Blade" franchise, director Guillermo del Toro pumped in 2000 CCs of action! Wesley Snipes shines as Blade, a human born of a vampire mother with all the abilities and none of the weaknesses. Ron Perlman ("Hellboy") provides a menacing antagonistic foil as Reinhardt, leader of the Bloodpack, a special ops group of vampires. They team up against an even greater threat–a new species of bloodsucker that preys on vampires! Del Toro even revolutionizes camera work in the opening sequence, which actually ups the ante from what viewers saw in the first "Matrix"! A great popcorn flick comparable to its more serious predecessor

FROM HELL (2001, Fox) Dark, bloody, sexy and violent–"From Hell" even makes Johnny Depp seem cool. Based on Alan Moore's epic Jack the Ripper tale of the same name, "From Hell" sees Depp (as Inspector Abberline) square off in a battle of wits with the most notorious serial killer in history. Playing a hooker who's ripe to be the Ripper's next victim, Heather Graham turns in a bra-busting, cleavage-filled performance, while Depp's clairvoyant detective and the Ripper himself cross paths memorably in one of the final scenes. "I'm going to give birth to the 20th Century," says the killer, played to creepy perfection by Ian Holm. "You're not going to see the 20th century," retorts Abberline. You go, Jump Street

AMERICAN SPLENDOR (2003, HBO Films) Who woulda thought that a biopic based on a struggling comic writer who works as a file clerk at a hospital would make for such an endearing flick? Apparently, film festivals like Sundance and Cannes (where "Splendor" has managed to pick up a bevy of awards) think so. "Splendor" (based off of a succession of autobiographical Dark Horse mini-series) shows legendary comic scribe Harvey Pekar as a simple man trying to cope with an ever-changing world where he never seems to fit in. Paul Giamatti ("Pig Vomit" from Howard Stern's "Private Parts") portrays Pekar, a bitter, angry and ultimately misunderstood genius.

THE CROW (1994, Miramax) Always marked by the tragic on-set death of star Brandon Lee, "The Crow" stands as one of the darkest, most violent comic book films ever created. True to its roots in James O'Barr's comic series, the film follows Eric Draven, a 20-something who returns from the grave seeking revenge on the men who murdered him before raping and killing his fiancée. Filled with high-octane action sequences (such as when a double handgun-toting Draven takes out a room full of mobsters), "The Crow" became an instant cult hit with fans and launched an entire franchise of sequels. Simple but compelling, "The Crow" can be summed up by one of Lee's most memorable lines: "It's not a good day to be a bad guy."

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (1990, New Line) God, we love watching these turtles–and we're not ashamed to admit it. Despite the fact that by the time this movie hit theaters the Turtles had ascended from gritty, underground anti-heroes to kid-friendly, Saturday morning fodder, "TMNT" still captures what makes the Turtles mythos so cool: the origin of our heroes, wisecracks that are actually funny, badass Casey "Wayne Gretzky on steroids" Jones and kick-ass action sequences where the Turtles take on the Shredder's Foot Clan! The turtle costumes (created by Jim Henson's Creature Shop) not only look like actual amphibians, but they actually allowed the martial artists wearing them to fight fluidly. As Splinter says at the end, "I have always liked. .Cowabunga!" Us too, dude.

BATMAN: MASK OF THE PHANTASM (1993, Warner Bros.) The second-best Bat-flick of all time doesn't rely on names like Keaton, Burton or West–just the phrase, "Your angel of death awaits." Deftly mixing a recap of Batman's origin, the intro of creepy vigilante the Phantasm, and a pitch-perfect voice performance by Mark Hamill as the Joker, the animated "Mask" (from writer Paul Dini and co-director Bruce Timm, the team behind "Batman: The Animated Series") finds the Dark Knight implicated in the brutal murders of Gotham's top crime bosses. Arguably the one film that truly captures the dark essence of Batman, "Mask" shocked viewers with its violence and death, heretofore unseen in a "kiddie" flick.

MEN IN BLACK (1997, Columbia) The "X-Files" ain't got nothing on the Fresh Prince. Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones play Agents Jay and Kay, two top-secret government suits working to stop an alien race from blowing up Earth in this perfect blend of science-fiction fare, off-the-wall comedy and a booty-bouncing soundtrack. With tons of eye-popping special effects and alien costumes, "MIB"–loosely adapted from the 1990 Marvel comic book series–became a $250 million-plus hit and helped launch Smith's superstardom when he took on the biggest, baddest alien-insect ever with style. "Oh, was that your auntie?" says Smith, stepping on a roach to piss off a looming foe. "Then that must be your uncle over there."

AKIRA (1988, Streamline Pictures) C'mon, say it with us: "TETSUOOOOOOOOO!" With the manga clocking in at over 2,000 pages, a straight book-to-film adaptation would have a running time of roughly two months. However, director (and *Akira* creator) Katsuhiro Otomo keeps the best parts of what made the manga (revolving around government experiments on children with ESP abilities) a cult classic: sex, drugs and motorcycle gangs in a post-apocalyptic Tokyo. The animation still holds up in these digital times, especially the high-speed motorcycle fight sequences at the beginning–you can feel each concussion and every bone shatter! Even if you don't know the first thing about anime or manga, "Akira" has all the elements of a great comic movie: action, more action and monsters!

BLADE

August 21, 1998

Wesley Snipes (Blade), Stephen Dorff (Deacon Frost), Kris Kristofferson (Abraham Whistler), N'Bushe Wright (Dr. Karen Jenson), Donal Logue (Quinn), Udo Kier (Vampire Elder Dragonetti), Arly Jover (Mercury), Traci Lords (Racquel)

The first theatrically released film featuring a Marvel Comics character in over a decade didn't feature a mutant, a super-soldier or even a human—it featured a Daywalker.

Based on the vampire-hunting Marvel hero introduced in the 1970s, "Blade" finds a reinvigorated Wesley Snipes (as the half-human/half-vampire) squaring off against Deacon Frost, a mad bloodsucker seeking to bring forth a new age of vampirism to the world. Trying to control his lust for blood while fighting back the forces of evil, Blade must prevent the coming bloodbath that will ensue if the vampires take over. Of course, as Blade puts it, the vampires don't have much of a chance. "There are worse things out tonight than vampires," says Blade. "Like me."

Written by comic movie scribe David Goyer ("Crow: City of Angels," "Nick Fury") and directed by Stephen Norrington ("The League of Extraordinary Gentleman"), "Blade" perfectly captures the spirit of the dark, brooding hero in the hyper-violent mix of action and horror that won the film an R rating—an oddity for a comic book-based film, but one that paid off. "Blade" was the first theatrical release from Marvel Studios and grossed a tidy $70 million, giving Marvel properties a firm foot in Hollywood's door.

Rapper turned actor LL Cool J ("Deep Blue Sea") was originally considered for the part of Blade before Wesley Snipes earned the role following years of rumors that he would star in a Black Panther film. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

RAZOR'S EDGE Wesley Snipes and Stephen Dorff check out each other's shaves in the heat of battle.

IDIOT BOX IDOLS

10 comic TV flicks that leave us groaning

When it comes to comic book movies, every rose has its thorn. Most of the time, those thorns are made-for-TV movies with cheap production values and even cheaper stars. Here are some of our favorite "Ugh"-inducers.

(at right, 1979) Is that Evel Knievel? Nope, it's star Reb Brown, who dons the Cap mantle after he's attacked by spies seeking the secrets of his late father, the original Captain America. He's injected with the FLAG serum and given a keen motorcycle, helmet and a see-through shield. See-through shield?

(1979) Cap, still wearing that stupid helmet, battles a purse-snatcher and a terrorist played by Christopher Lee. At one point, Cap even fights dogs—that bend his shield! Gah!

(1978) Fresh from his performance in "Orca," mpressively mustached actor Peter Hooten dons a garish robe and sash to star as Doc Strange. Originally aired on CBS as a pilot for a potential series, this telefflick was thankfully banished to Limbo.

(1996) Even though it featured Gen-Xers Banshee, Jubilee, Skin and Mondo (as well as Finola Hughes as a hot White Queen), dirt-poor special effects and the guy who played Max Headroom as the villain killed this Fox flick.

(1997) This unaired CBS pilot (which has enjoyed a long life as a heavily traded bootleg) featured Guy Gardner, the Flash, the Atom and "M*A*S*H" alum David Ogden Stiers as a very portly Martian Manhunter. How low was the budget? Instead of showing action sequences, the events were reported on the "Metro City News."

(1988) The first TV movie after the TV series' cancellation, Lou Ferrigno's Hulk teams up with a ridiculous Thor (who has a penchant for calling the Hulk "Troll") to stop bad guys from stealing the Gamma Ray Transponder—which doesn't do much of anything.

(1989) David Banner gets arrested after hulking out on the subway. Good thing blind lawyer Matt Murdock takes his case! Primarily a would-be pilot for a "Daredevil" TV series, the Hulk doesn't even appear in the final action scenes!

(1990) For the last TV movie installment, Banner hooks up with a Black Widow-ish foreign spy before turning into the Hulk and plummeting from a helicopter to his death. Wait, what?

(at left, 1998) When you think Nick Fury, you think grizzled, badass spy. When Fox TV execs think Nick Fury, they think...David Hasselhoff.

(1996) Talisa Soto (Katana from the "Mortal Kombat" flicks) stars as the titular bloodsucker (a vampire princess from the planet Drakulon, in this case) who travels to Earth in a toy rocket ship to battle Who frontman Roger Daltrey. Need we say more? ■ **JOHN B. LACEY**

BATMAN

RELEASE DATE June 23, 1989

Michael Keaton (Batman) Jack Nicholson (Joker), Kim Basinger (Vicki Vale) Pat Hingle (Commissioner Gordon), Michael Gough (Alfred)

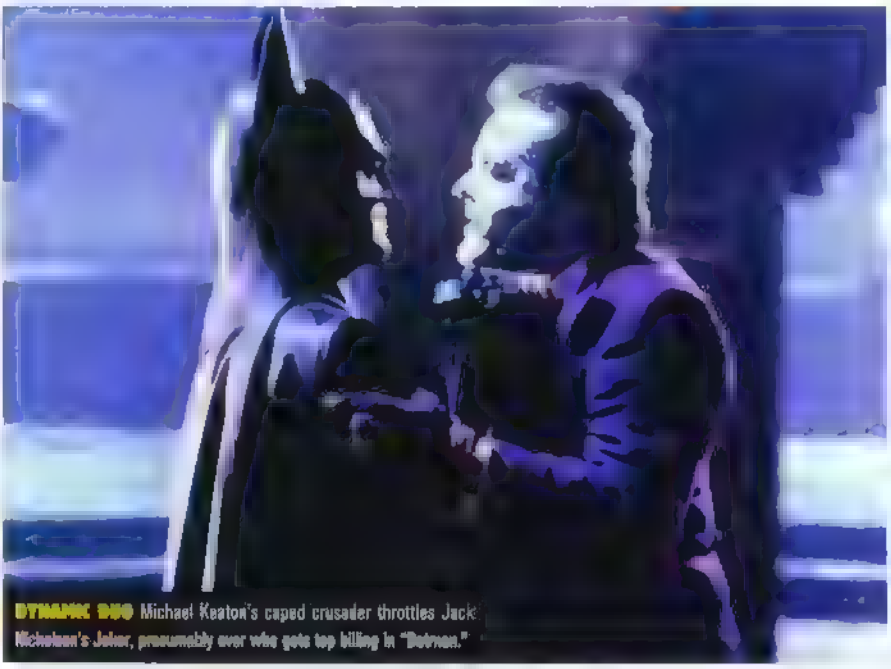
It's a classic moment in comic movie history: a mugger, dangling over the side of a building in the Gotham City night. "Who are you?!" he squeals. The answer is simple, direct—and completely badass.

"I'm Batman."

Director Tim Burton took the Dark Knight into his quirky hands and crafted a moody, edgy flick that launched the Batman film franchise into the stratosphere, proving that dark superhero movies could work—and making hard rubber suits fashionable in the process. Closely following comic book lore (aside from those machine guns on the Batmobile), the story finds the orphaned millionaire Bruce Wayne emerging from the shadows to strike fear into the hearts of criminals everywhere. When the chemically scarred Jack Napier starts a crime spree as the psychotic Joker, Batman—previously an urban legend—is thrust into the public spotlight for the first time.

Although critics initially railed against the casting of Michael Keaton ("He's too short!" "He was in 'Mr. Mom'!"), the actor proved the naysayers wrong by nailing the role of the brooding Wayne, and Jack Nicholson perfectly captures the homicidal humor of Batman's deadliest foe ("Ever dance with the devil in the pale moonlight?"). Toss in Kim Basinger as the sexy photojournalist bent on uncovering the secret of the mysterious Batman, and you've got an all-star cast that does justice to their comic book counterparts.

DIDJA KNOW? "Batman" boasted not one, but *two* veterans from the "Star Wars" trilogy! Gotham City District Attorney Harvey Dent was played by none other than Billy Dee "Lando Calrissian" Williams, and crooked GCPD cop Lt. Max Eckhardt was played by William Hootkins—a.k.a. the ill-fated X-Wing pilot Jek Porkins. ■ RICHARD HO



DYNAMIC DUO Michael Keaton's caped crusader throttles Jack Nicholson's Joker, presumably over who gets top billing in "Batman."

THE ROCKETEER

RELEASE DATE June 21, 1991

Bill Campbell (Cliff Secord), Jennifer Connelly (Jenny Blake), Timothy Dalton (Neville Sinclair), Alan Arkin ("Peevy" Peabody)

Not all heroes can fly like Superman—but try telling that to a dude with a rocket strapped on his back.

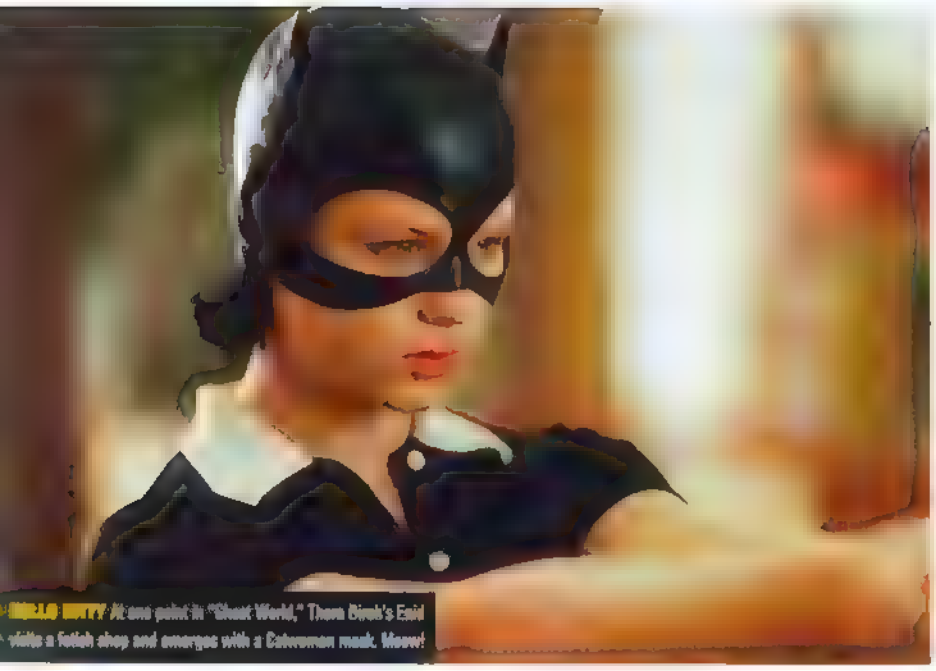
Based on Dave Stevens' classic graphic novel, "The Rocketeer" combines the look of an Indiana Jones flick with the spirit of a pulp comic strip adventure. Ace pilot Cliff Secord stumbles across a whole new way to soar when a rocket-powered backpack falls into his lap. With the help of his mentor Peevy's engineering skills, Cliff becomes the high-flying Rocketeer.

Of course, it ain't an action movie without villains, and "The Rocketeer" delivers in spades. The rocket itself becomes embroiled in a Nazi conspiracy as the technology's wanted for military purposes, and the man leading the Reich's charge is Neville Sinclair, Hollywood star and secret Nazi double agent. When Sinclair kidnaps Cliff's girlfriend Jenny (played by a jaw-droppingly hot Jennifer Connelly), the Rocketeer flies into action to save the girl.

But don't worry—"The Rocketeer" never forgets its comic roots. When Sinclair attempts to explain the purpose of the jetpack to a dimwitted henchmen, he says, "It's a rocket. You know, like in the comics." On top of that, the exhilarating flying sequences bring to mind Christopher Reeve and Neo from "The Matrix Reloaded," and the final fight between Cliff and Sinclair aboard the German airship felt like it was taken straight from a comics page.

DIDJA KNOW? Jennifer Connelly's character was named Betty in the original Dave Stevens stories—as in Betty Page, the famous '50s pinup girl that Stevens used as the inspiration for the character! ■ RH

ROCKET POWER "Uh...Peevy? How about not groping my rocket pack like that?"



HELLO KITTY? At one point in "Ghost World," Thora Birch's Enid visits a fetish shop and emerges with a Catwoman mask. Meow!

Based on the Fantagraphics series by Daniel Clowes, "Ghost World" follows the tragically hip (and incredibly hot) best friends Enid and Rebecca as they begin their lives post-high school. In between changing her appearance on a daily basis, hassling her friend Josh at the convenience store and trying to find her place in the adult world, Enid befriends a quirky, sexually frustrated record collector named Seymour and discovers that she and Rebecca are on separate paths in terms of what they want from life.

However, it's not all gloom and doom with "Ghost World." In fact, the film has some of the funniest scenes ever seen in a comic flick. Case in point, there's Doug, a shirtless mullet-head who's a regular at the convenience store. Surviving on nothing more than beef jerky and malt liquor, Doug spends his days blasting death metal from his boombox and practicing his nunchuck skills in the parking lot. During a brief stint working at a movie theater, a patron asks Enid if beer is available. "I wish!" she replies. "Actually, you wish...after about five minutes of this movie, you're gonna wish you had 10 beers."

DID YOU KNOW? Throughout "Ghost World," Enid can be found scribbling in her sketchbook, which viewers get a glimpse of at various times throughout the movie. Many think Clowes supplied the drawings, but in fact the artwork is by Sophie Crumb, Robert Crumb's daughter. ■ **CASEY SELJAS**

7 GHOST WORLD (MGM, PG-13)

RELEASE DATE: July 20, 2001

CAST: Thora Birch (Enid), Scarlett Johansson (Rebecca), Steve Buscemi (Seymour), Brad Renfro (Josh), Illeana Douglas (Roberta), Bob Balaban (Enid's dad)

THE SKINNY: "Ghost World" may not feature any superheroes, spandex or even ghosts, but you can count on hot chicks.

6 X-MEN (Fox)

RELEASE DATE: July 14, 2000

CAST: Hugh Jackman (Wolverine), Patrick Stewart (Professor Xavier), Ian McKellen (Magneto), Famke Janssen (Jean Grey), James Marsden (Cyclops), Halle Berry (Storm), Anna Paquin (Rogue), Tyler Mane (Sabretooth), Ray Park (Toad), Rebecca Romijn-Stamos (Mystique), Bruce Davison (Senator Robert Kelly)

THE SKINNY: Fans waited almost four decades for a live-action "X-Men" film, and director Bryan Singer ("The Usual Suspects") made it well worth the wait. Playing up the high-concept, science fiction aspects of the Marvel mutant universe, Singer focused on the bigotry of the human race and the outsider nature of the X-Men while making sure he filled the film adaptation with jaw-dropping action, humor, romance and everyone's favorite mutant, Wolverine.

The nefarious Magneto has devised a plan to transform the world's leaders into mutants, and it's up to the X-Men to stop their oldest and most dangerous foe and save those that fear them. Never straying too far from the X-Men's comic book roots, one of many comic-inspired scenes found Rogue asking Wolverine if it hurts when he pops his trademark claws. "Every time," says a solemn Logan, rubbing his knuckles.

But it wasn't just straight-from-the-comics-page dialogue that made "X-Men" a hot property with fans–the all-out action scenes of Wolverine ripping into both Sabretooth and Mystique made moviegoers sit up and take notice of a then unknown Australian actor named Hugh Jackman.

DID YOU KNOW? Hugh Jackman was almost a never-was in "X-Men." Producers had initially cast Dougray Scott ("Ever After") as Wolverine, but the actor dropped out of the production to film "Mission Impossible 2" instead. Jackman stepped in to fill the claws, much to fanboys' delight. ■ **MC**

KEEP ON ROLLIN' As Professor X, Patrick Stewart ponders mutant-human relations and kickass REO Speedwagon tunes.

TIME HARD ROAD Don't feel bad, Tom—most of us don't know what "perdition" means, either.

5 ROAD TO PERDITION

[illegible] July 12, 2002

[illegible] Tom Hanks (Michael Sullivan), Paul Newman (John Rooney), Jude Law (Harlen Maguire), Jennifer Jason Leigh (Annie Sullivan)

[illegible] Believe it or not, Tom Hanks will kill you without flinching.

Based on the critically acclaimed graphic novel by Max Allan Collins, "Road to Perdition" follows Michael Sullivan (Hanks), a man leading two completely different lives. On one hand, he's a loving husband and devoted father to two young boys. On the other, he's an uncompromising mob hitman known as the Angel of Death. However, his two worlds inevitably come crashing together when his son, Michael Jr., witnesses how his dad pays the bills, and the elder Sullivan's world is flipped upside down when he discovers his wife and younger son have been rubbed out because of it. Now, Sullivan and son are on the run not only for survival, but revenge against the murderers of his family.

"Road to Perdition" serves as a father/son flick without the sappiness or token "I love ya, dad" ending. For the first time in his career, Hanks plays a tough-as-nails bad guy (okay, maybe he isn't *all* bad), while Newman's simmering portrayal of mob boss Rooney would make Michael Corleone bow down in respect. Director Sam Mendes ("American Beauty") delivers a comic book movie that sets a new standard of what can be accomplished with a comic adaptation—brilliant settings, powerful performances and proof that you can get away with a drama among the fanboys.

[illegible] "Road to Perdition" was inspired by two major influences. First, from the real-life accounts of betrayed mob enforcer John Rooney, and second, from Kazuo Koike's classic Japanese manga, *Lone Wolf & Cub*, which follows the adventures of a lone samurai with his infant son in tow. ■ **CS**

4 SUPERMAN [illegible] Warner Bros.

[illegible] DATE December 15, 1978

[illegible] Christopher Reeve (Superman/Clark Kent), Marlon Brando (Jor-El), Gene Hackman (Lex Luthor), Margot Kidder (Lois Lane), Jackie Cooper (Perry White), Glenn Ford (Pa Kent), Terence Stamp (General Zod)

[illegible] Forget that "Superman" made America believe a man could fly. The film's greatest achievement remains that it convinced average moviegoers, Hollywood and comic book fans that an impressive comic film could be made through acting and special effects.

Thanks to a then-unknown 24-year-old actor named Christopher Reeve, director Richard Donner and special effects that still hold up today, "Superman" stands as the template by which today's superhero films are judged. With Oscar winner Gene Hackman supplying a defining performance in the role of Superman's arch-nemesis Lex Luthor, the film's witty dialogue and intense dramatic scenes kept fans coming back for multiple viewings.

"Is that how a warped brain like yours gets its kicks?" Superman asks his genius foe during their final confrontation. "By planning the deaths of innocent people?"

"No, by causing the deaths of innocent people," replies Luthor with a glare.

A perfect blend of modern-day storytelling and comic book continuity, "Superman" left every kid in America wanting to don a cape and save Lois Lane.

[illegible] Steven Spielberg was offered the chance to direct the "Superman" film but producers balked at the virtually unknown director's demands. The producers decided to wait until they saw how "Jaws" (which Spielberg had just completed) did at the box office. "Jaws" went on to make over $260 million, and Spielberg went on to other projects. ■ **MC**

KAL-ELEVATED More than any other actor, Christopher Reeve made us believe a man can fly—and stare sternly.

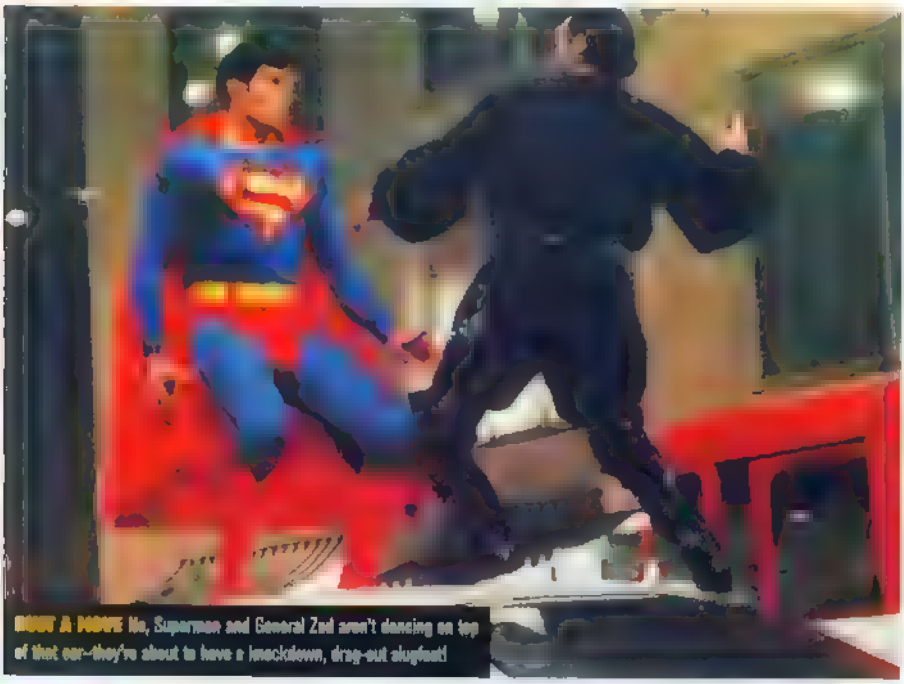
3 SUPERMAN II (Warner Bros.)

RELEASE DATE June 19, 1981

CAST Christopher Reeve (Clark Kent/Superman), Margot Kidder (Lois Lane), Terence Stamp (Zod), Sarah Douglas (Ursa), Jack O'Halloran (Non), Jackie Cooper (Perry White), Marc McClure (Jimmy Olsen)

COOL FACTOR While the first "Superman" film re-defined the character for a new generation, the second film reminded people why, when it comes to superheroes, Supes is the end all, be all.

"Superman II" begins at the Eiffel Tower, where terrorists threaten to detonate a nuclear bomb. Supes saves the day but inadvertently releases a trio of imprisoned Kryptonian baddies–Non, Ursa and General Zod–with equal powers to the Man of Steel. When the three attack Earth and claim it in the name of Zod, the world looks to Superman for help little do they know Supes has given up his powers in the hopes of starting a family with Lois Lane.



BOOM A MOOM No, Superman and General Zod aren't dancing on top of that car–they're about to have a knockdown, drag-out slugfest!

While "Superman" celebrated the hero, the sequel brings Kal-El's humanity to the forefront as he tries to live as a normal human before facing the greatest challenge of his life–the combined efforts of Zod, Zod's two goons and a devious Lex Luthor. Transcending the make-up and silly costume, Zod stands as one of the most terrifying villains to grace (or is that disgrace?) the silver screen. Add in some classic lines (Ursa, "You are master of all you survey." A bored Zod, "So I was yesterday. And the day before.") and a kickass final battle, it's clear that "Superman II" earns its stripes as a certified comic book classic.

DIDJA KNOW? Actor Gene Hackman actually opted out of appearing in the second "Superman" film. The scenes he does show up in were deleted scenes from the first movie, and additional scenes that called for Lex Luthor were shot using body doubles and voice impersonators! ■ **CS**

2 SPIDER-MAN (Sony)

RELEASE DATE May 3, 2002

CAST Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker/Spider-Man), Willem Dafoe (Norman Osborn/Green Goblin), Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane Watson), James Franco (Harry Osborn), Cliff Robertson (Uncle Ben Parker), Rosemary Harris (Aunt May Parker), J.K. Simmons (J. Jonah Jameson)

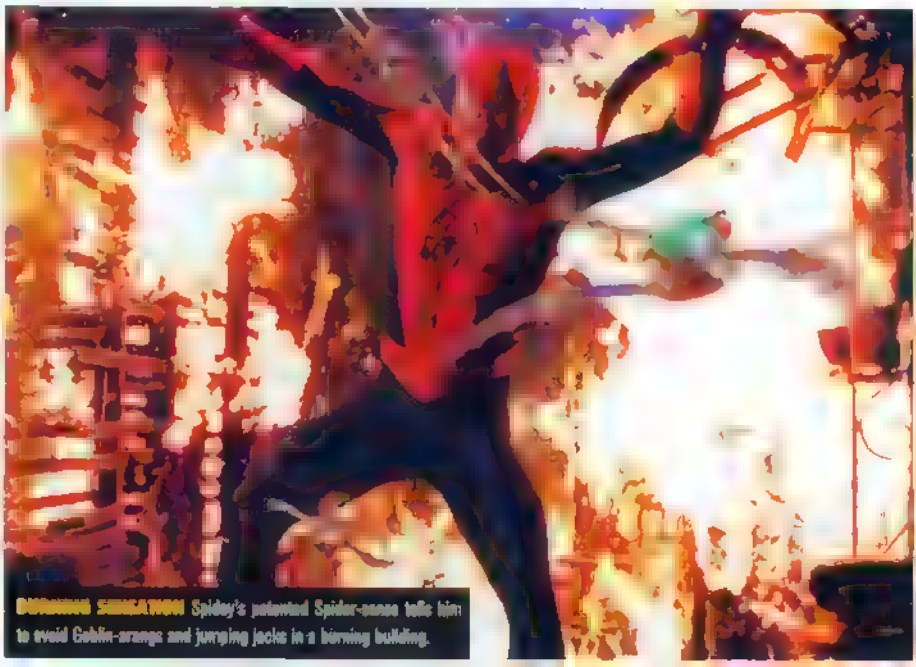
COOL FACTOR "Superman" made fans believe a man could fly, but "Spider-Man" made fans believe a boy could swing, leap and spin his way to box office success.

Assembling a star-driven ensemble cast, director Sam Raimi strove to keep his adaptation of the Spider-Man mythos as close as he could to the comics while updating the story for a whole new generation of fans. From Peter Parker's first scenes as a goofy, introverted high school science geek to his awe-inspiring, bloody battles with the Green Goblin, Raimi and company nailed the film for both comic book novices and hardcore fanboys.

But "Spider-Man" wasn't just a succession of slugfests. One of the most touching aspects of the film was the developing love story between Peter Parker and Mary Jane. But just as MJ finally reveals her true feelings to Spider-Man's alter ego, the young hero learns the greatest lesson of all–he can't let anyone in.

"Whatever life holds in store for me, I will never forget these words. 'With great power comes great responsibility,'" laments Parker. "This is my gift, my curse. Who am I? I'm Spider-Man."

DIDJA KNOW? Raimi and Columbia went through a number of choices to play the film's villain Norman Osborn, including Nicolas Cage and John Malkovich, before settling on Dafoe, an Oscar nominee for 2000's "Shadow of the Vampire." ■ **MC**

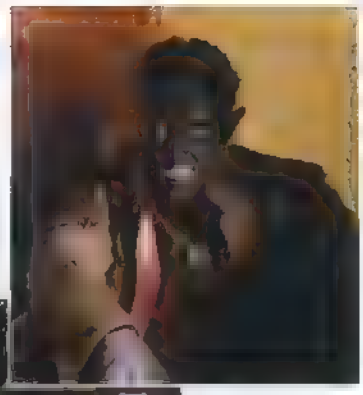


BURNING SENSATION Spidey's patented Spider-sense tells him to avoid Goblin-arrangs and jumping jacks in a burning building.

1 X2: X-MEN UNITED (Fox)

RELEASE DATE May 2, 2003

CAST Patrick Stewart (Professor Xavier), Hugh Jackman (Wolverine), Ian McKellen (Magneto), Halle Berry (Storm), Famke Janssen (Jean Grey), James Marsden (Cyclops), Rebecca Romijn-Stamos (Mystique), Brian Cox (William Stryker), Alan Cumming (Nightcrawler), Anna Paquin (Rogue), Kelly Hu (Deathstrike), Aaron Stanford (Pyro), Shawn Ashmore (Iceman)



"X2" let everyone know Wolverine's claws ain't just for picking his teeth.

"You want to shoot somebody?" bellowed Wolverine at fearful soldiers as he unsheathes his claws again. "Shoot me!"

An even bigger thrill for fans, though, was finally seeing more of Wolverine's past in the Weapon X program. Learning that Stryker may hold the keys to unlocking his lost memories, Wolverine confronts the villain only to learn that it wasn't Stryker's choice to turn Logan into a shameless, killing machine—it was his own.

But Wolverine wasn't the only standout in the film—the imprisoned Magneto shines as he painfully extracts the iron right out of a guard's blood, forming three small iron balls that he then uses to destroy his plastic prison, letting everyone that he truly is, "a god among ants."

Billed by director Bryan Singer as "The Empire Strikes Back" of the X-Men saga, there's already talk generating about an "X3." Could "X2" have a possible contender for its title as Greatest Comic Book Movie of All Time? Maybe—just so long as Singer doesn't get "Return of the Jedi" on the brain and replace the Ewoks with X-Babies.

DID YA KNOW? Originally Singer planned to use a visual-effects heavy scene involving the X-Men's training facility, the Danger Room. But budget cuts and timing nixed the scene even though *Ultimate X-Men* artist Adam Kubert had already storyboarded the scene. According to Singer, the scene may appear in a third X-Men film. ■ MC

WHY IT RANKS What does it take to rank as the No. 1 comic book movie of all time? More mutants than you can shake a Marvel Universe Handbook at!

Loosely based on the 1982 X-Men graphic novel *God Loves, Man Kills*, the sequel to 2000's "X-Men" blockbuster saw a bevy of mutants—both good and bad and new and old—unite against William Stryker, a former U.S. general bent on wiping out Homo Superior. From the effects-heavy opening sequence of Nightcrawler teleporting through the White House to the film's climactic onset of Jean Grey's unleashed Phoenix powers, the film stands as the most stunning and accurate comic book adaptation of all time.

It was the debut of so many new mutants to the big screen that put comic fans and casual moviegoers in a fervor. Everyone from Iceman to Pyro to Kitty Pryde to Colossus to Nightcrawler to Deathstrike to a retooled Mastermind (even Siryn!) fulfilled every fan's fantasy X-Men film and left the audience gasping. (For even more cool "X2" comic tidbits, see the Coming Attractions story on p. 104.) Eagle-eyed fans will catch even more cool X-moments on the upcoming DVD such as the Russian flag on Colossus' wall and the carnival posters of Nightcrawler in his classic X-Men costume inside the church he dwells in.

Of course, one of the high points for many comic book fans was finally seeing Wolverine unleash the berserker rage he often displays in the comics as he takes on Stryker's military invasion force at Xavier's School for Gifted Children. Whether it was leaping from a banister, claws extended, to unleash punishment or charging gun-toting soldiers,

Mike Cotton, Brian Cunningham, Richard Ho, Zach Oat, Jake Rossen, Casey Seijas, Andy Serkin and Jesse Thompson all watched numerous comic movies for this feature and have since gouged their eyes out with those little comic umbrellas.

BEST OF THE BEST The presence of Nightcrawler (top right), Pyro unleashed (top left) and Wolverine's berserker rage (above) make "X2" the clear-cut victor.

X-MEN 2: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX.

COMING attracti

SMASH OF THE TITANS

DC's super-teens graduate to animated TV 'toon

TITANS UP Although aimed at younger readers and incorporating an anime feel, "Teen Titans" is rooted in the Marv Wolfman/George Pérez *New Teen Titans* comics.

Supervillains. Teen angst. The occasional zit. These are the challenges facing the young heroes of "Teen Titans," the brand-new animated series that will launch on Cartoon Network on Saturday, July 19.

But luckily, there's one thing the Titans *won't* have to worry about—adults (the Justice League, in particular) looking over their shoulder.

"Batman will never, ever show up," promised Sam Register, Cartoon Network's Senior VP of Development. "We decided to keep the Titans in the Batman animated universe [separate from the Flash, Wonder Woman and Superman universes] because we needed Robin. But if Batman shows up, Robin becomes a sidekick again, as opposed to the excellent team leader that he is."

Once the decision to go with Robin was made, the rest of the roster fell into place. "Because this is the Batman universe, Wonder Girl and Kid Flash were immediately out," explained Register. "And being a fan of the Marv Wolfman/George Pérez [*New*] *Teen Titans*, I definitely wanted Beast Boy, Cyborg, Starfire and Raven. We'll introduce some other teenage superheroes from the DC universe in the second season, but these five are the core five."

Developed in conjunction with Warner Bros. Animation, "Teen Titans" will appeal to the 6-11-year-old crowd. "The mission was to make an action show that kids are going to love," said Register. "So first of all, no multi-episode storyarcs like 'Justice League.' Each episode is its own nugget, with a beginning, middle and end. Second, they're teenagers, so let them do things that teenagers do! They've already learned how to control their powers, but they aren't fully developed mentally—and that's where the humor and comedy comes in.

Teen Titans images courtesy of Cartoon Network

HOLLYWOOD AND TV STUFF THAT YOU CARE ABOUT

Toons

The characters get mad at each other. We do super-deformed stuff with their faces, and there's some really fun, lighthearted stuff that you haven't seen in a lot of action cartoons."

But don't expect all fun and games. "When the action starts, we want them to kick butt!" declared Register. "[Producer] Glen Murakami is extremely influenced by anime, and he's been a great help to the development of the show."

Cartoon Network wanted to shake things up with a style that was different from the Warner Bros. house style, and Murakami delivered. "Glen came up with a sort of fusion between East and West, a style that we call 'Murakanime,'" laughed Register. "It's definitely an American-looking cartoon, but there are Eastern influences that constantly come out. And make no mistake: It's hardcore, badass, kickass action. Just because it's a kids' cartoon doesn't mean we suck the marrow from its action bones!"

Of course, you can't have ground-shaking action without powerful supervillains—and the Titans are in for epic face-offs against some classic baddies from their comic past, including Dr. Light and arch-nemesis Slade (a.k.a. Deathstroke). "You'll see Slade behind the scenes in the beginning, and we slowly reveal him through the first 13 episodes. He's after something that we don't reveal until the final two episodes of the season—and Robin is a big part of it. The season will end with a dramatic Robin vs. Slade confrontation."

Beyond that, plot details for the first season remain top secret, but one thing is clear—the producers aren't wasting any time explaining *how* the Titans got together. "We never deal with the origin—ever!" proclaimed Register. "Who cares about all that continuity? We don't! Kids just want to watch the action, and hardcore fans know the origin anyway. Our main goal is to make the show entertaining. So when the first episode starts, you never question it. They're the Teen Titans from day one." ■ **RICHARD HO**

RINGIN' UP REGISTER

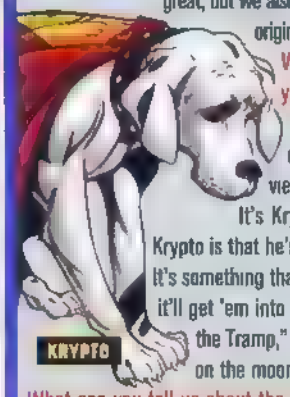
CONFESSIONS OF A COMIC GEEK

Some fanboys just have it made.

As one of the top dogs at Cartoon Network and a self-proclaimed "total comic geek," Sam Register goes to work everyday with the power to put some of his all-time comic faves on the animated fast track. *Wizard* caught up with the giddy executive to find out what makes this geek-in-a-suit tick.

WIZARD: You hobnob with tons of comic book creators—you even had Peter David work on an early version of the "Teen Titans" proposal. What other creators do you talk to, and are there projects being born from your networking?

REGISTER: The Men of Action [comic creators Joe Casey, Joe Kelly, Steve Seagle and Duncan Rouleau] have a show in development called "Ben Ten," which is *Shazam!* meets *Dial "H" for Hero*. It's about a kid who can turn into one of 10 different superheroes, all original. I also have things in development with Mark Waid and Paul Dini, both original superhero shows. Cartoon Network will continue to make DC shows because they're great, but we also know that there needs to be more original superhero stuff out there.



What's the next DC property you're going to tackle?

We're pretty far into development on our next show, for even younger viewers [4-8-year-old preschoolers] It's Krypto the Superdog! Our take on Krypto is that he's Superman for the animal world. It's something that we think little kids will dig—and it'll get 'em into superheroes early. It's "Lady and the Tramp," but with capes and burying bones on the moon.

What can you tell us about the rumors that a new Batman animated series and an Aquaman project are in the works?

I know a pitch for a new Batman series is going around, but as far as I'm aware, it hasn't landed anywhere yet.

What are your favorite comics?

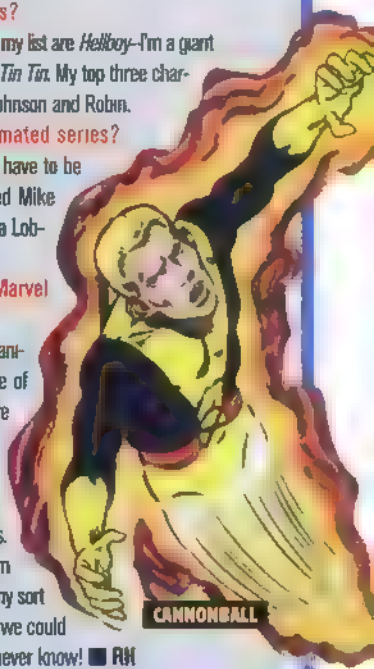
Currently, the comics at the top of my list are *Hellboy*—I'm a giant Mike Mignola fan—*Astro City* and *Tin Tin*. My top three characters? Green Hornet, Lobster Johnson and Robin.

Any chance of a Hellboy animated series?

If we ever did it, I think it would have to be for Adult Swim. I actually called Mike Mignola and said I wanted to do a Lobster Johnson cartoon!

Would you like to tackle any Marvel characters?

I would love to do a New Mutants animated series. It's such a reverse of the Teen Titans, because they're still learning how to use their powers. I'd do it with Sunspot, Cannonball and the original characters in the yellow and black suits. That would probably be my dream Marvel project. We're not under any sort of exclusive contract with DC, so we could conceivably do something. You never know! ■ RH



TRAILERS...

PUNISHER "Up your uzi with a rubber hose!" In a huge casting coup for Artisan and Marvel Studios' big-screen "Punisher" (set for release in summer 2004), superstar John Travolta has signed on for the role of Howard Saint, a former underworld figure who goes straight but returns to the game once his son is slain, leading to conflicts with Frank Castle. Filming begins in Tampa, Fla., this July. The teaser poster (seen above) has already been released to theaters, and fans can check out the official movie site at **www.punisherthemovie.com**. "We're very proud to have John Travolta on board," gushed Marvel Studios head Avi Arad. "He was a fan of the script, and that's what sold him."

CONSTANTINE Music video director Francis Lawrence, who's worked with Britney Spears and P.O.D., will helm the *Hellblazer* film adaptation to star Keanu Reeves.

FANTASTIC FOUR "We hope to have 'Fantastic Four' in theaters by November 2004," said Arad. "It's hard to say when we'll do casting, hopefully in the next few months." "Twin Peaks" writer Mark Frost is currently reworking the script.

HELLBOY An official image of Ron Perlman as Hellboy can currently be viewed on the film's official site, **www.hellboymovie.com**.

IRON FIST "Daddy Day Care" director Steve Carr has signed on to direct the one-time hero for hire's screen debut. "Iron Fist is Carr's favorite character," said Arad. "We're trying to get the script done."

SPIDER-MAN 2 Rumors galore! Rumors indicate that Doc Ock will awake in a hospital bed after his robotic arms have been fused to his body and will attack his doctors and nurses. Brooke Adams (who plays Felicia Hardy) has stated that her character contributes to "Spider-Man 3" by driving someone crazy in "Spider-Man 2"! Harry Osborn, perhaps?

SUPERMAN Could "Star Trek: The Next Generation" director/star Johnathan Frakes guide the Man of Steel to the big screen? Insiders have claimed that Frakes has held several meetings with Warner Bros. execs. Believe it or not, WWE superstar "Hulk" Hogan has said he was approached to possibly play the role of a Kryptonian bad guy!

X-MEN 3 Director Bryan Singer has expressed interest in helming a third X-flick, but he'd like to take a couple of years off from the franchise and direct a couple of smaller features first. While it's an almost certainty that Halle Berry won't return as Storm, producer Lauren Schuler Donner has said that a third movie would depend on Hugh Jackman's availability. Wolverine remains the obvious first choice for a potential spin-off film. Both Rebecca Romijn-Stamos and Daniel Cudmore (who was seen briefly as Colossus) have reportedly already signed on for an "X-Men 3." "X2" Production Designer Guy Dyas has said that elements left out of "X2" (like the Danger Room) are likely to appear in a third movie, such as the Beast, his laboratory and both Angel and Archangel!

Y–THE LAST MAN Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra's Vertigo series has been optioned by New Line Cinema. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

'X2' QUESTIONS ANSWERED!

As much as we loved "X2: X-Men United" (see where it ranks in our 50 Comic Movies feature starting on p. 82), there were moments that left us scratching our heads. Here are some of the things you might've missed:

What other X-characters besides Jamie Maddrox and Remy LeBeau did we see on that computer screen list of mutants?

Kenuicho Harada [Sunfire], Garrison Kane [Weapon X], Eric M. Lensherr [Magneto], Artie Maddicks [Artie, of Artie and Leech fame], Xi'an Coy Mahn [Karma], Maximoff (2) [Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch's last name], Kevin McTaggart [Proteus], Danielle Moonstar [Mirage], Paige Guthrie [Husk] and Samuel Guthrie [Cannonball]

What were all the files seen on the other computer screen?

Franklin Richards, Omega Red, Muir Island and Project: Wideawake (the Sentinel program!) each had files.

What happened to Wolverine's sense of smell? He could tell Mystique was at Liberty Island just by sniffing in "X-Men", but makes out with her in "X2" and has no idea?

"Well, there's two possibilities," said "X2" Executive Producer Tom DeSanto. "Either Wolverine wasn't sniffing to see who she was or he didn't care. Maybe he thought this was as close as he'd ever get to Jean and that was good enough. That is, until he feels those scars and decides it's wrong."

In *Secret Wars*, Magneto makes a comb out of the metal dust in the air. Was that the inspiration for him making weapons out of the iron in the guard's blood?

"Actually, I think [director] Bryan Singer came up with this," explained DeSanto. "It wasn't inspired by anyone's comic, but it's definitely a treat for the hardcore fans."

Will "X3" be "The Dark Phoenix Saga"? And how did the Liberty Island incident affect Jean's powers?

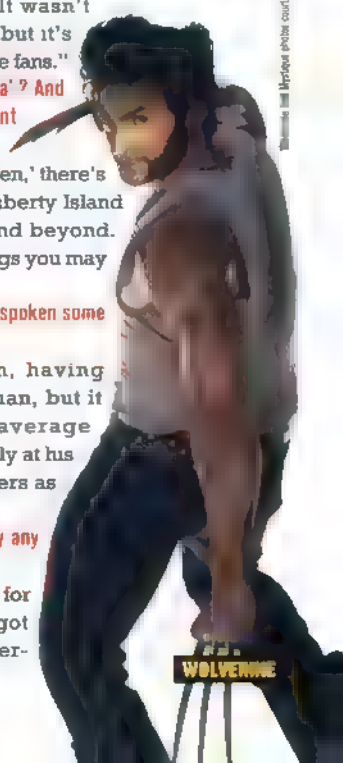
"If fans go back and watch 'X-Men,' there's a lot of things that happen at Liberty Island that are peppered for 'X2' and beyond. Watch it closely, you'll see things you may have missed."

Being geeky, couldn't Colossus have spoken some Russian just for fun?

"We considered, early on, having Colossus speak a little Russian, but it seemed confusing for an average audience. But if you look closely at his room, you'll see Russian posters as well as a Russian flag."

Was Stryker's son Jason inspired by any comic book character?

"No, he's an original creation for the film. But he's obviously got some characteristics of Mastermind." ■ **MIKE COTTON**



Wolverine and Mystique photos courtesy of 20th Century Fox

COMIC ENVY

Comics inspire video games galore

FACT: You don't need a bona fide comic book property to make a kickass comic book game. Want proof? Just check out the following non-comic book games, all of which have been influenced by comics in some way or other.

XIII (Ubi Soft) This first-person action-adventure boasts a "graphic novel presentation," with a fast-paced story, flashback graphics and pop-up windows that combine to give the narrative a panel-by-panel feel. There's even Batman-style sound effects ("Bam! Zap! Rattatattat!") and word balloons with lettered dialogue! As for the story? The President of the United States has been assassinated, and you're a deadly agent mixed up in a government conspiracy with no memory of your past. (Fall 2003, PS2, Xbox, GameCube)

ADVENT RISING (Majesco) With a script by famed science fiction author Orson Scott Card, this epic third-person action adventure puts gamers against the Seekers, a race of aliens bent on destroying the last remnants of the most powerful race of beings in the universe—humans. As Gideon Wyeth, players will be surrounded by visually stunning environments and incredibly detailed enemies, with a dynamic combat system based on the *Unreal Warfare* engine at their disposal. (Early 2004)

DRAKE (Majesco) Take the awesome time dilation effects of "The Matrix," combine it with the look of "Batman: The Animated Series," toss in the intense action of a Hong Kong movie and top it all off with the dynamic stylings of a comic book, and you've got *Drake*, a groundbreaking third-person action shooter from Majesco. Described as having a "neon-gothic comic book style," the moody story follows a resurrected member of a murdered gang who's back to take revenge and kick some supernatural butt. With a pistol or sword in each hand, players can run up walls and back flip off them, all while firing in every direction imaginable. And word is the game will come packaged with the first issue of the comic book adaptation. (November 2003, Xbox)

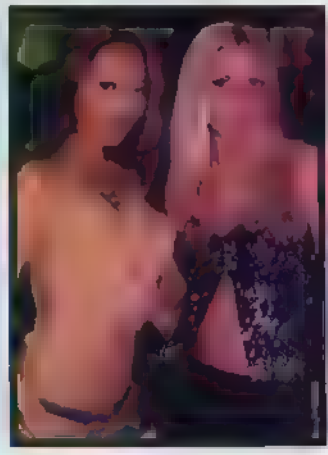
CITY OF HEROES (NCsoft) You've always wanted to live the life of a superhero—and now you can! *City of Heroes* is your typical massively multiplayer online role-playing game...with a superhero twist. Players become citizens of Paragon City, the birthplace of costumed superheroes, by customizing their unique characters with powers and costume variations. And yes, you can choose to be either heroes *or* villains! After your character is created, you can go on solo missions or team up with other heroes to go on numerous missions throughout the incredibly detailed city. (2004, PC) ■ RH

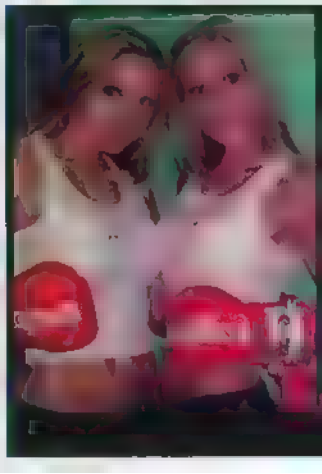
model mania

BOOTH BABES E3 STYLE

Staring at screens all day long can be tough on the eyes. Thankfully, the ridiculously hot models give lovesick E3-goers something else to focus on.

Here's a tantalizing glimpse of some of the stunning ladies that graced our eyeballs at the show!





manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

CHILD OF THE ATOM

Japan's most famous young robot Astro Boy gets a tune up on Kids' WB!

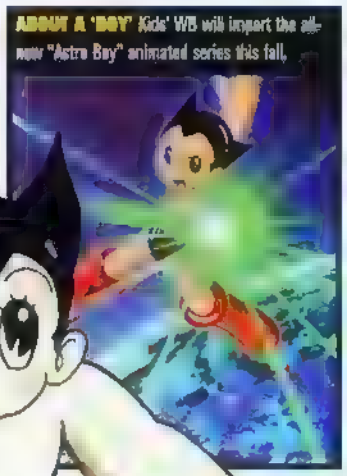
Who's the most famous cultural icon in Japan? It isn't Mickey Mouse or Superman. It's Astro Boy, Osamu Tezuka's "God of Manga" most famous and beloved creation, and he returns after 40 years to American airwaves on Kids' WB! this fall, complete with a brand new look. To commemorate Astro Boy's 50th birthday on April 7, Sony launched a brand-new, modernized version of Astro Boy for today's audiences in Japan. Kids' WB will import and translate it for the U.S. this fall.

"Astro Boy's universal appeal has made him a timeless character representing justice and reason in the world," says Tara Sorensen, VP of Creative Affairs, Sony Pictures Television. "It's a thrill to introduce Astro Boy to a new generation of kids."

Starting on Japanese television back in the early 1960s, Tezuka's tale of a scientist who replaces his dead son with a super-powered robot named Astro Boy (in the Japanese version, he's called Atom) is celebrated the world over. The original anime series ran a total of 193 episodes, most of which were dubbed and brought to American shores, also in 1963. The Astro Boy phenomenon had begun, but it's been a long time since the 1960s, and little Astro Boy could stand an oil change.

Using the latest in computer-generated animation, this new Astro Boy show maintains the decidedly 2D look and feel of Tezuka's classic series while giving the show a visual boost to bring it in to the 21st century. The animation in each episode is near-theatrical quality and shows off just what animators in Japan can do with the right amount of money! Since the writers of this new series could never stray too far from the original story under threat of riot from millions of devoted Japanese Astro Boy fans, the story remains the same.

The first episode that aired in Japan details Astro Boy's creation and his first battle. Dr. Elefun brings Astro Boy, a robot boy with amazing powers and the ability to think and feel, to life as though he had a soul. Not everything goes according to plan; Astro Boy's awakening as a newborn child is punctuated by a series of dangerous mishaps that turn the public against him. Then, Metro City's power generator, a gigantic Gloworm, goes berserk; and it's up to Astro Boy to stop him! Instead of defeating the rampaging power source, Astro Boy shows compassion and hears the Gloworm out, absorbing the overflowing energy into his own body and saving both Metro City and the Gloworm. Tezuka's themes have always been compassion and empathy for all things; clearly, this new series will not tarnish the manga god's original vision.



ABOUT A 'BOY' Kids' WB will import the all-new "Astro Boy" animated series this fall.

[SPOILER WARNING!]

The plot thickens in the seventh Japanese episode, where it's revealed that Astro Boy is the discarded creation of Professor Tenma, who has since created a more powerful robot named Atlas. Atlas lacks Astro Boy's compassion, and the two duke it out, much to Astro Boy's dismay. Astro Boy isn't happy with the story of his origin; Dr. Elefun had no intention on revealing Astro Boy's "birth" father, and was hoping to raise Astro Boy as a good natured and heroic boy. Professor Tenma has other plans, though, and his vicious and angst ridden Atlas provides Astro Boy with trouble at every turn.

[END OF SPOILER WARNING]

Needless to say, Astro Boy is a very involved show, one that presents challenging ethical themes, just as Tezuka intended. The show has been receiving rave reviews from Japanese fans young and old and should ignite a phenomenon when it airs on Kids' WB! this fall! Astro fans can also look forward to Sony's computer animated Astro Boy movie, which is now in production. As the show's catchphrase goes, "Catch the Future!"—Astro Boy's fans seem like they already have. ■ **ZAC BERTSCHY**

(WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY RICHARD KIM)

ANIME BUZZBOX

JAPANESE RUMOR MILL

LONE WOLF AND CUB THE MOVIE? According to published reports, director Darren Aronofsky ("Pi," "Requiem For a Dream") has been attached to the "Lone Wolf and Cub" live-action theatrical movie. Based off of the hit Dark Horse manga series, the film is slated to be re-envisioned for a contemporary audience, as there have already been several Japanese live-action films of the baby-toting samurai. Two of them are already available from Animeigo.

MUSEUM WING GUNDAM Good news for anime fans and gift shop enthusiasts! On July 19th, Bandai Japan will be opening a Bandai Museum outside of Tokyo featuring an underground theater, a Gundam themed coffee shop and a two-floor toy store. It will also boast several floors of exhibits dedicated to Bandai properties, including Sailor Moon, Ultraman and the Super Robot Series. The top two floors are dedicated to Gundam and will have a life-sized (24 foot tall) Gundam bust! (We'll refrain from making the required giant bust joke here.)

SCHOOL SPIRIT Need more schoolgirls in your life? AD Vision has announced that it will be bringing the endearingly-cute comedy "Azumanga Daioh" to the states, premiering on the Anime Network (possibly this year) before its DVD release. The 26-episode series follows a group of girls through high school where they're forced to deal with teachers a lot less mature than they are!

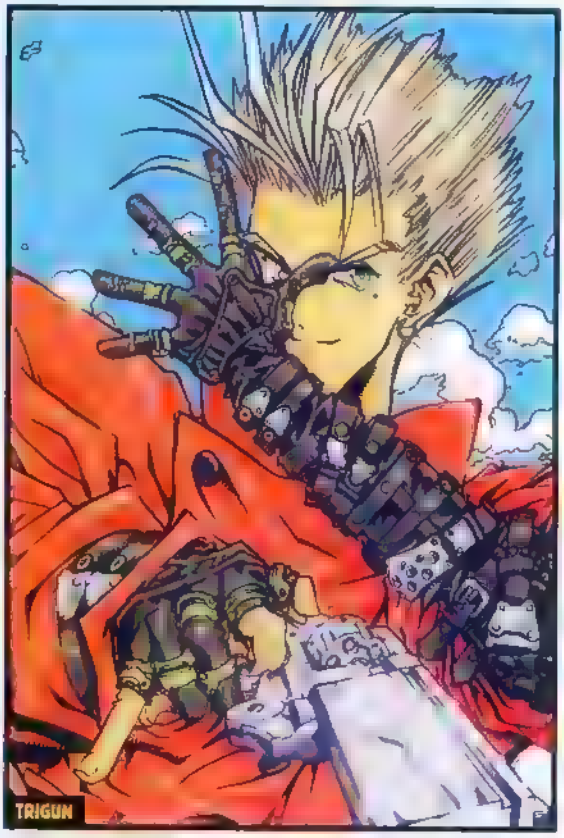
FORTE OF ARMS Fans of the sex and violence-heavy–yet surprisingly cute–adventures of mercenary Mikura will soon have more, as the Japanese production company Studio Arms has confirmed that it will be producing a new animated "Mezzo Forte" TV series. While no U.S. or Japanese release dates have been announced, the original OAV series is already licensed in the U.S. by Media Blasters.

LUPIN IT If you're trying to complete your Lupin DVD collection, here's the next step. Pioneer will be releasing the first Lupin the 3rd movie, "Mystery of Mamo," on DVD for the first time in the states on July 29th for $29.98. (Streamline Pictures released a VHS version in 1995.) Pioneer has also acquired the rights to "Haibane Renmei," the story of Rakka, a newly hatched angel learning to survive in a quasi-medieval world where angels are second-class citizens. No release dates have been set.

'TRIGUN' TRIUMPHANT

Dark Horse shoots the works for manga line

In a move highly anticipated by manga and anime fans, Dark Horse and Digital Manga announced at the 2003 Book Expo that they would be co-publishing the long-awaited original *Trigun* manga, which the hit anime is based on, along with *Hellsing* and the manga adaptation of *The Ring*.



"Dark Horse Comics is aggressively expanding its manga line, exploring new titles and formats, and yet we're upholding our established reputation as publishers of some of the best manga available," said series editor Tim Ervin-Gore, ensuring Dark Horse's place as a manga heavy hitter.

Stepping away from the monthly comics format, each series will be published as trade paperbacks, in the right to left format. *Trigun* and *The Ring* will be released first on Nov. 1, with *Hellsing* following on Dec. 1.

Trigun has been a fan-favorite property for years, even before the airing of the anime series on Cartoon Network. Created by Yasuhiro Nightow, the story takes place on a futuristic planet with a gunslinger named Vash the Stampede who has a $60 billion bounty on his head, yet is an extreme pacifist at heart.

Kouta Hirano's *Hellsing* is another fan-favorite, featuring a bloodthirsty vampire named Arucard who helps the British Hellsing Organization get rid of artificially spawned vampires.

The Ring manga is a blend of the continuity from the original Japanese movie and subsequent TV series, written by Hiroshi Takahashi and drawn by Misao Inagaki. Slightly different than the American remake, the story goes a lot deeper into Sadako (Samara)'s identity ■ TRISHA L. SEBASTIAN

A CUT ABOVE THE REST

ADV to release 'Evangelion' director's cut on DVD

If you've never seen "Neon Genesis Evangelion," ADV offers you another chance to catch the show that many claim is the most addictingly confusing anime ever done.

ADV hopes to clear some of the stories up with its announcement to release the "Director's Cut" versions of the last two DVDs in the show. The new episodes will integrate footage from the original TV episodes with the material that was produced for the movies (currently available from Manga Entertainment), along with some new material—making a more complete and possibly more coherent storyline.

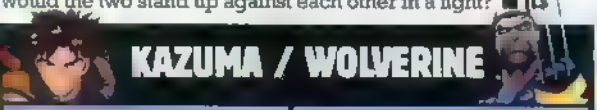
Each new director's cut episode will be shown side by side with the original TV episode, which means that collectors will have the entire series on DVD and will be able to replace the DVDs in their existing box sets.

But what's the difference between the director's cut episodes and the original episodes? "The real difference is that rather than just a collection of scenes that tries to encapsulate what happened, you're now looking at the original episodes with the new footage seamlessly integrated into it," explained Matt Greenfield, co-founder of ADV and senior producer.

ADV has yet to schedule a release date, but one factor in determining it could be the dub track for the new episodes. "Not all of the [voice] actors *have* to record new lines, but there are some cases where we will probably be going back and fixing problems that were inherent in the original translations we were working with," Greenfield said. "It's been seven years since I last worked on anything "Eva"-related and that's given me a lot of time to mull over decisions we had to make very quickly while doing the original recording." ■ **TRISHA L. SEBASTIAN**

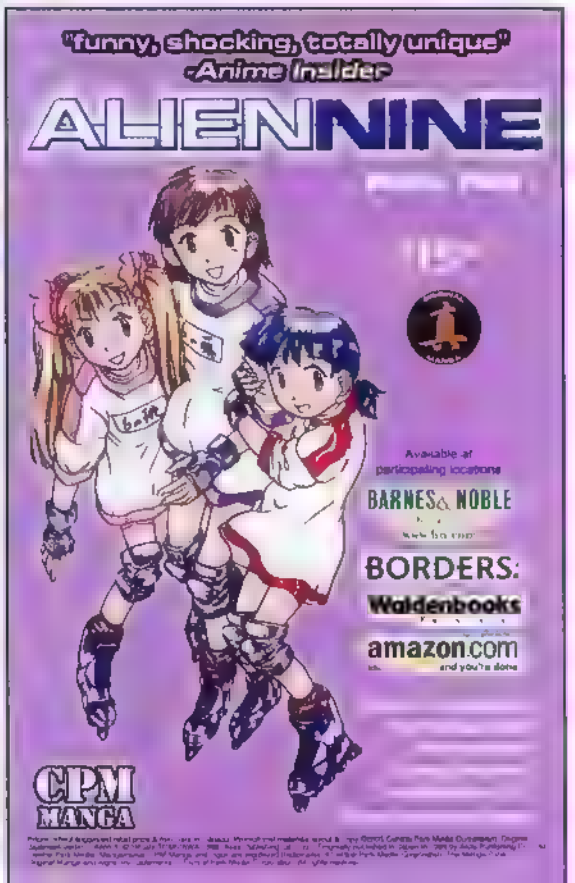
WOLVERINE VS. KAZUMA

With the July 15 release of *s-CRY-ed*, a new anime character is introduced: loner hero Kazuma, who has been granted fantastic abilities since birth—and sounds suspiciously like a loner hero named Wolverine from the X-Men. But how would the two stand up against each other in a fight? ■ TLS

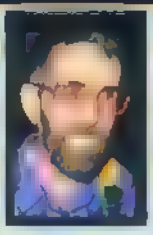


Sports a giant metal arm	Sports indestructible metal claws
Is dating the sweet and innocent Kanami **EDGE:** Kazuma	Was dating the sweet and innocent Mariko—till she died
An arrogant kid who enjoys pounding his foes into jelly	A hardened veteran who enjoys slicing his foes into bite-sized pieces
Sidekick includes boyishly handsome getaway driver	Sidekicks include nubile ninja-telepath and fiery red-headed telekinetic **EDGE:** Wolverine
Takes five minutes and some hair gel to get his hair "just right"	Would never admit it takes two hours and a gallon of mousse to get his hair "just right," bub

BOTTOM LINE: Sorry to cut you down to size, Kazuma, but Wolverine is still the best there is there is what he does.



riffin'withgiffen



Keith Giffen has reenlisted for another tour of duty in the comics trenches.

The grizzled, opinionated veteran writer returns with a vengeance starting in July, when he teams with former *Justice League* collaborators J.M. DeMatteis and Kevin Maguire for a six-issue mini-series called *Formerly Known as the Justice League* (#1 ships July 2 for $2.50).

Starring comedic *JLI* staples Booster Gold, Blue Beetle, Fire, Elongated Man, Captain Atom and new recruit Mary Marvel, this new mini-series finds the tongue-in-cheek heroes working out of a suburban strip mall to help the common man with jobs that the real League wouldn't touch with a 10-foot pole.

Wizard chatted with the irrepressible, outspoken Giffen…and failed to get much of a word in edge-wise. As Giffen himself puts it, "I'm loud and obnoxious, because somebody's gotta be."

First things first: Everyone in the office really liked *Formerly Known As.*

Well, talk it up, get it selling! I'm glad everyone likes it because I was really worried that maybe lightning was not going to strike twice. Humor's humor; I think if it's funny, it works. My favorite bit so far is the fact that they let me make Fire an Internet porn queen, and portray Booster as Niles Crane. You're never gonna see this older woman he dates, but we're gonna keep adding to her mythos like Maris on "Fraser." I still can't believe [DC] gave us Mary Marvel to soil. It's always nice to have somebody there to add lunatic innocence.

Right. .so what's the deal with…?

[*Interrupts*] If you think about it, all superheroes have now turned into what Alan Moore did in *Swamp Thing*–the *Uber*-people on the moon. Who do you call if you need a hero? I think the Avengers' number is unlisted. So when I thought of *1-800-SUPER FRIENDS* [the book's initial title], I just called [J.M.] DeMatteis and Kevin and said, "C'mon let's do it, let's do it." By the way, it's not called *Super Friends*, [DC] g—led out.

What was it like working with…?

It was a fast track, and I did the first six issues in a white heat, it was just stream of consciousness. And Kevin just nailed it like he was in this creative fugue state. Even before the first six issues were done, DC renewed another six. It's rare that a comic book company with the market being the way it is now, would give that kind of vote of confidence. But come on, this is second nature, this is like rolling off a log to me. I do the plot stream of consciousness with dialogue and everything, and then Kevin draws it and then Mark [DeMatteis] basically takes my unexpurgated stuff–because in mine, they're cursing, they're swearing, getting into arguments about bestiality, the whole nine yards–and he translates it into what DC's willing to publish, and we roll with it. It's a fun book, and I really think if you're not having fun doing the book, it shows.

You've mentioned on many occasions that humor…?

If *Formerly Known as Justice League* is anything to me, it is just proof that superheroes really shouldn't be taken all that seriously. I think they're better off when it's a little tongue in cheek, and they're looking at one another going, "We're wearing tights? This is ridiculous!"

What's on tap for the second…?

The crux of the second six issues is we send them to Hell, where they wind up as illegal immigrants. On the way out they take a wrong turn and wind up in the Ultimate DC universe. The Ultimate Super Friends. Of course, it's sort of a wink and a nod to what he's done because I get a kick out of the guy's work, but reading over the section of Hell is not Maxwell Lord, but [Ultimate writer] Mark Millar!

THE FORMERLY KNOWN AS JUSTICE LEAGUE TEAM

SECRET STASH comics' hidden gems

SUPER HERO HAPPY HOUR

'POWERS' MEETS 'CHEERS' WHEN CAPED CRUSADERS DROWN THEIR SORROWS, POKE FUN AT THEIR SIDEKICKS AND RUN UP A HULK-SIZED TAB

THE DIRT Let's face it—there's no more stressful job than professional superhero. So where does the cape-wearing set go to unwind after a tough day of fighting evil? They hit the bar in Geekpunk Comics' *Super Hero Happy Hour*, an ongoing series by writer Dan Taylor and penciler Chris Fason.

DOYA LIKE? Take a pint of Image's *Powers*, a shot of classic ensemble comedies like "Friends" and "Cheers," shake well, pour into a frosty mug, and you've got *Super Hero Happy Hour*.

DIDJA KNOW? The *SHHH* creative team met each other on the Digital Webbing message boards. "I was looking for a penciler for this series, and I just so happened to meet Chris," recalled Taylor. "I live in California and he lives in Alabama, and we only met for the first time at 2002's Mid-Ohio Comicon after working on the book for almost a year via e-mail and phone calls."

Two superheroes walk into a bar...

No, that's not the beginning of a joke that only a small fraction of fanboys would find funny, but rather the premise of *Super Hero Happy Hour*, a hilarious ongoing series written by Dan Taylor with art by Chris Fason. Oddly enough, series creator Taylor first came up with the idea in—of all places—a bar.

"I was hanging out at a bar one night, and that old 'Got Milk?' commercial came on with all the people dressed up as Marvel characters," explained Taylor. "So then I started thinking about superheroes in the real world, and actually came up with the idea as a possible movie. Then I met Chris [online] and pitched him a few comic ideas, but nothing seemed to get his interest. Then I told him about *Super Hero Happy Hour* and it all just clicked from there."

Proving that even superheroes just want to go where everybody knows their name, *SHHH* takes place in the Hideout Bar & Grill, a local watering hole frequented by First City's resident superhuman protectors looking for a breather from saving the world. But rather than discuss their daily heroic grind over root beers, these heroes riff on licensing deals, debate the pros and cons of breast implants and harass their sidekicks over double shots of Tennessee whiskey.

For instance, in *SHHH* #1, the Guardian (a naïve, golden god-like hero), Night Ranger (a dark vigilante), his smart-mouthed sidekick Scout, and the Eradicator (a guns-blazing anti-hero) discuss the Eradicator's new action figure. While the Eradicator's none-too-happy with the figure's terrible likeness and lack of kung-fu grip, Guardian quickly points out that at least his figure is a rare "chase" figure, and that they produced so many Guardian action figures that he's considered a "peg-warmer."

Despite their larger-than-life appearances and on-the-clock activities, Taylor fleshes out these characters in such a way that you'd happily pull up a Hideout stool

(L-R) NIGHT RANGER, THE BARTENDER AND GUARDIAN

HELLO FELLAS.
HEY NICK, IS THAT YOUR NIGHTMOBILE PARKED OUTSIDE?
DO YOU KNOW OF ANY OTHER?
WELL, YOU LEFT YOUR HEADLIGHTS ON.
GO TAKE CARE OF IT.
WHY ME?
BECAUSE YOU'RE THE SIDEKICK AND I'M THE SUPER-HERO. WHEN YOU ARE THE SUPER-HERO YOU CAN GIVE THE ORDERS.
THIS IS A JIP HONOR GUARD DOESN'T TREAT KID WARRIOR LIKE THIS.

THE BAR SCENE In *Super Hero Happy Hour*, costumed crusaders drown their sorrows while socializing, flirting and goofing on sidekicks.

and buy the next round. When Night Ranger first enters the bar in issue #1, he's hilariously welcomed by the Guardian as "Sister Christian" (a reference to the '80s hair band Night Ranger's signature song, for all you whippersnappers born *during* the Reagan administration). A few moments later, as Night Ranger attempts to trade arch-nemeses with the other heroes, Guardian excuses himself from the bar to "drain the sidekick," much to the chagrin of an offended Scout.

In issue #2, it's ladies' night as First City's resident superheroines (including Psiren and Galaxy Girl) raid *SHHH* to debate the benefits of bulletproof breast implants, the low neck-lines of their costumes and which members of the Go-Gos they most resemble, all over dry martinis.

With July's *SHHH* #3, the heroes welcome Randal, a hero seeking a cool name, up to the bar. As the glasses start clinking, a gang of baddies including Phantom Dread, Krimson Klaw and Voodoo Guru make their way into the Hideout (it appears that being a supervillain is just as stressful as being a hero).

"There's been a lot of talking going on in the first three issues so far, so I decided to let Chris have some fun in issue #4," hinted Taylor. "So expect to see some big action."

THE LAST WORD *Super Hero Happy Hour* knocks it out of the park by combining our two favorite forms of entertainment—comics and sweet, sweet booze! With a concept that's as ingenious as a two-for-one happy hour and laughs that hit faster than a shot of Wild Turkey to your dome, *SHHH* won't leave you skunky. ■ **CASEY SEIJAS**

WANNA PICK THIS SERIES UP?

Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit **www.geekpunk.com** to order directly. Do you know about a cool series that deserves to be covered in Secret Stash? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY, 10920, or e-mail **secretstash@wizarduniverse.com**.

HIDE'N'SEEK

TRACK THESE BABIES DOWN

Does *Super Hero Happy Hour* sound like a winner? Then why not check these books out as well? All items ship in July unless otherwise noted.

TOP SHELF'S BLANKETS Linus never had it this bad.

Writer/artist Craig Thompson gained critical acclaim for his graphic novel *Goodbye, Chunky Rice*, and now the creator returns with his highly anticipated sophomore effort, *Blankets* from Top Shelf Productions.

Fans of Thompson's heartfelt stories will be bowled over with this 592-page (!) graphic novel as the creator lets it all hang out by describing his journey into his teenage years, sibling rivalry and his first love. Jumping from parties where he never seemed to fit in to struggling with a long-distance love that's doomed to fail, Thompson guides readers through his personal life in an intimate, no-holds-barred fashion. Neil Gaiman has called *Blankets*, "probably the most important graphic novel since *Jimmy Corrigan*." Find out why by visiting **www.topshelfcomix.com**. $29.95.

FANCY FROGLIN James Kochalka's rude and nude Fancy Froglin makes his first full-length comic debut this month in an all-new graphic novel *Fancy Froglin Volume 1: Sexy Forest* (right). Who knows what X-rated trouble Fancy will get into, but it's guaranteed to make you laugh (and blush). **www.alternativecomics.com**, $12.95.

MONKEY ON YOUR BACK Ken Knudsten's angry cross-dressing simian makes his way to your wardrobe with Slave Labor Graphics' all-new *My Monkey's Name is Jennifer* T-shirts. Each displays Jennifer in all his glory (and rage) with two outrageous sayings that we can't print here, but read them for yourself at **www.slavelabor.com**. $16.95.

BONGO SUPERHEROES Bongo Comics–known for their line of "Simpsons" books–makes their way into the superhero realm with *Heroes Anonymous*, an all-new, bimonthly series (written by *Simpsons Comics* staples Bill Morrison and Scott M. Gimple) that follows a group of washed-up superheroes and their adventures–in therapy! **www.bongocomics.com**, $2.99.

SPX ANTHOLOGY The 2004 *SPX Anthology* is out and ready to hit the road! This year's anthology (tying in with the Small Press Expo in Bethesda, Md. on Sept. 19-20) finds the top creators of the indy circuit illustrating something they're all too familiar with–travel. This year's edition includes all-new works by Jamie Hernandez and a host of up-and-coming indy talent. Visit **www.spxpo.com** for more info. $9.95. ■ CS

ATTENTION INDY CREATORS Think your book has what it takes to make the "Secret Stash" cut? Then stop by the Wizard Edge booth at this year's Wizard World Chicago convention (August 8-10) to hand your book off directly to *Wizard* Staff Writer Casey Seijas for consideration in either "Secret Stash" or next year's *Wizard Edge* special!

'NET GAINS

FRIEND OR FOIL?

'Fantastic Four' #500 marks return of foil-enhanced cover–with a twist

What do the words "foil-enhanced cover" mean to you?

If you're a comic fan who survived the infamous speculator market 10 years ago, it could conjure bitter memories of publishers manufacturing collectible events with cover gimmicks. But Marvel re-introduces the collectible comic with a new spin in July. The anniversary issue *Fantastic Four* #500 will be available in two versions: a double-sized, non-enhanced "regular" version for $3.50, and a foil-cover version billed as a "Director's Cut," which features such extras as deleted scenes, creator commentaries and outtakes, all for $4.99. (Note: The title reverts to its Vol. 1 numbering with what would be Vol. 3, #71.)

"[Marvel EIC] Joe Quesada and [Marvel President] Bill Jemas have never backed away from the notion that comics shouldn't be collectible," said Mike Doran, Marvel's marketing and communications manager. "There's a belief here that collectibility is a positive part of the market. We obviously don't want to do it a lot, but when it makes sense, like with a big anniversary."

Doran compares the "Director's Cut" to the popularity of DVDs. "This is for the people who crave these sorts of details—the making of, deleted scenes and all that. And like some DVDs, it has a certain collectible appeal."

Back in the early '90s, the first few comics with cover enhancements were well received, but when every publisher (and his brother) starting slapping metallic ink on every third cover, those comics went from cool to cataclysmic. Pushing comics as collectibles is cited as one of the big reasons the comic market bottomed out in those days. It has many retailers viewing the release of *FF* #500 with caution, and some with alarm.

"Why are they doing it?" asked Brian Kozicki, owner of Buried Under Comics in Manchester, Conn. "It hurts our industry every time it's done and the exact same mistakes will happen again. *FF* #500 reeks of that collector mentality."

Eric Thornton, general manager of Chicago Comics in Chicago, is wary as well. "Most of our customers have been around long enough to know that comics are not an investment. They still have their boxes of *Turok* #1 in their basements. If *FF* #500 starts a new trend, I'll warn people, but I can't stem the tide."

But Kozicki, Thornton and most other retailers agree on one thing: The current *FF* stories are darn good.

"We're going to hype *FF* #500 up a lot and we're ordering an abnormal amount," said Stan Daniel, manager of Capt. Comics in Hoover, Ala. "This is the best *FF* stuff I've seen in years. If anything deserves a special treatment, it's something like this. As long as Marvel doesn't do it every time Wolverine pops his claws, I'm okay with it."

Retailers needn't worry. "We don't have any other 'Director's Cuts' planned right now," said Doran. "*Supreme Power* #1 will come in a regular version and a special edition, but it's not along the same lines as *FF* #500. Depending on the response to *FF*, there's a good possibility with core books like *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Avengers* that we'll do similar anniversaries. "But done on a smart basis," Doran quickly added. "We're not going to go nuts with these."

■ JIM AREKART

A COVER THING With *Fantastic Four* #500, Marvel will release a regular version and a "Director's Cut" version with foil-enhanced cover. Some fans are concerned the return of the cover gimmick signals Grimm tidings.

BULLPEN

LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

NOVEMBERFEST 4!!!

If you think the *Wizard* staff's scary on a monthly basis, you should see them on a Saturday night after a few shots of Wild Turkey.

During May's twice-annual "Novemberfest" celebration, *Wizard* staffers and over 100 assorted friends partied until the sun came up Sunday morning to celebrate...well, actually no one really knows what they were celebrating.

"We're here to party for a free democracy in Canada," screamed *Wizard* Associate Editor Andy Serwin before being pulled aside by celebrity guest Seth Green (Scott Evil from the "Austin Powers" films) to inform him that Canada was, in fact, a democracy. "Free Toronto now!" Serwin bellowed on.

Of course, the party wasn't without its hiccups. Just after 10:30 p.m., the keg was tapped and the savages--especially Wizard Editor Brian Cunningham--were on the prowl for more suds.

"Who the hell bought a quarter keg?" exclaimed Cunningham before being forced to drink a Zima. "If I don't have a cold brew in my hand in the next half hour, someone's getting canned. And I'll fire someone else--I'm looking at you, Mike Cotton--each half hour until there's a new keg."

After a quick beer run by Serwin and the soon-to-be unemployed Cotton, the party was back on its feet. As the event winded down at 5:30 a.m., the coppers arrived (for the third time), ushering everyone to their cars and using the phrase "public nuisance" rather liberally.

"The cops actually kind of helped out," admitted host and Wizard Editorial Director Matt Senreich. "I really wanted to go to bed, but some people just didn't take the hint. Next year, I'll call the cops."

DEVILS' NIGHT OUT Novemberfest attendees Seth Green (right), Managing Editor Andy Serwin (below right) and Associate Editor Jesse Thompson (psycho in hat) bring the metal.

TAKING A WIZ

ALSO AVAILABLE

TWISTED TOYFARE THEATRE VOL. 3

Legendary "Star Wars" actor Mark Hamill provides the intro to our third collection of hilarious TTTs, but this volume also includes the Official Handbook to the TTT Universe, with bios and profiles of all your favorite characters, as well as a Make Your Own TTT feature for you do-it-yourselfers at home!

On sale July 23 in comic shops
On sale Aug. 8 everywhere

TOYFARE #73

It's the ultimate toy tussle: DC vs. Marvel! Find out which company's action figures reign supreme, as the JLA take on the Avengers and Spider-Man takes on Batman! And did you ever wonder how a ruthless terrorist organization bankrolls their exploits? Find out when we take you behind the scenes of Cobra's accountant, hosted by Cobra Commander himself!

On sale July 9 in comic shops
On sale July 22 everywhere

INQUEST GAMER #100

Celebrate our milestone 100th issue! Take a trip down *Magic* memory lane as we revisit the greatest "Killer Decks" of the past 10 years and update them with new sets and cards. Also, check out the Top 100 HeroClix figures of all time and preview the highly anticipated Cosmic Justice set!

On sale July 2 in comic shops
On sale July 15 everywhere

NEXT ISSUE...

A SNEAK PEEK

BEHOLD...WIZARD #0!!!

We've teased you for months...but beginning next issue, an all-new *Wizard* will hit stores. To give our readers the best possible comic magazine for the 21st century, we've massively overhauled the mag to create a *Wizard* you've NEVER seen before! So you better be here next month to enjoy what we think is the start of the greatest Wizard era ever. Trust us--next issue will leave you begging for more!

NEXT MONTH IN WIZARD #0

EXCLUSIVE MARVEL & DC COMICS!

These ain't previews, but six-page stories that you'll only find in *Wizard* #0! First up, Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee offer a six-page Batman story that takes place between *Batman* #616 and #617 (see left)! Then, Marvel EIC Joe Quesada makes his triumphant return to penciling when he teams up with Brian Michael Bendis for a six-page prequel to the *Ultimate Six* mini-series!

"SPIDER-MAN 2" SET VISIT!

Check out *Wizard*'s first on-set visit for one of the most anticipated films of 2004 as we take you behind the scenes of "Spider-Man 2"! We'll get the scoop from director Sam Raimi and stars Tobey Maguire and Kirsten Dunst!

TOP 100 X-MEN BOOKS!

What are the Top 100 single X-Men issues ever produced? Well, we've compiled 'em for ya! Find out where classics such as "The Dark Phoenix Saga" and other overlooked stories fit into our equation!

WIZARD#0

On sale July 30 in comic shops! On sale August 12 everywhere!